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AT THE SIGN OF THE SILVER FLAGON.

By B. L. FARJEON. [Second Edition.]

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No. 105.

AT THE SIGN OF THE SILVER FLAGON.

A NOVEL.

By B. L. FARJEON,

Author of "Blade-o'-Grass," "Love's Victory," etc., etc.

PART THE FIRST.

THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD.

I.

SILVER CREEK TOWNSHIP.

It is December, and the sun is at a hundred and six in the shade. We are at the end of the world which, speaking in a worldly sense, we call the other end; we are in Australia, at Silver Creek, twelve months ago a wilderness, now a busy township. Within this brief space an infant in the history of cities has grown into a man. There is but one principal street in Silver Creek township, but that is a mile and a half long, and is lined with wooden tenements and calico tents, in which the business of the town is transacted. Stores of every description, in which all things necessary, and many things unnecessary, for the proper carrying out of life, are to be found along the line of this thoroughfare, which is called High Street. You may calculate how many stores High Street contains by setting down its length as a mile and a half, and by averaging each store at sixteen feet frontage. Some are built of wood, many of calico, and the inhabitants of one Englishman's home can hear the inhabitants of the next laughing and talking, and bargaining during the day, and sighing and murmuring and groaning during the night. Not that the inhabitants of Silver Creek are all Englishmen; other nationalities, thirsting to have their fingers in the golden pie, have sent their representatives, and Americans, Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Mongolians, and even Africans, hob-a-nob with one another, and make common cause of it with the ubiquitous Englishman. The pie is a rich one, but the fruit is unequally distributed, and there are many waste places in it (not seen until the crust is dived into), the discovery of which brings disappointment to the hungry seekers.

High Street had only one side, where the stores were built. Opposite the stores, at a distance of some four hundred yards, were hills, not very high, on which a long thin range of wooden houses was erected, which formed the Government Camp, where the official business of the township was transacted. There were the resident magistrate's court, the treasury, the jail, and all the necessary adjuncts of civil government. The Gold-fields' Commissioner, or the Warden as he was sometimes called, and his staff, and the resident magistrate, and some of the lesser luminaries, dwelt there, with their Chinese cooks, who were rare masters at crust and paste, which was but natural, as they were proverbially light-fingered. There they chattered, and cooked, and smoked opium in their little wooden pipes, of which they were as tenderly solicitous as though they had been children of their blood; and went elsewhere to the vilest and dirtiest nest of thoroughfares which the imagination can conjure up, and which was known as the Chinese Camp, to gamble away their hard earnings. In this camp, of course, was the Joss-house, with its absurd and senseless mummeries; and there, also, were certain dens where the Chinaman digger went to smoke himself into helplessness and idiocy. The provision stores were stocked with curiosities in the eating way which made fastidious persons shudder—such as preserved slugs and snails (delicious delicacies to the Chinese palate), and bottles filled with what seemed to be pieces of preserved monkey, while thousands of shreds of shriveled

meat hung from the calico roofs, which were black with smoke. These shreds weighed about an ounce each, and looked like the dried and twisted skins and tails of rats. If ever night was made hideous, the Chinamen made it so in their camp, with the clanging of their gongs and tom-toms, and with the high treble of their voices. Between the Government Camp and High Street ran a valley, through which a stream of water meandered; this was the Silver Creek, from which the township derived its name. At the back of the High Street stores, dotting the hills and gullies for miles around, and at the back again of the Government Camp, were the white tents of the diggers. There was an eminence from which one could look down upon the scene, and it was well worth the labor

of twenty yards from each other; then they clustered together and stood loosely about. In consultation? no; to fill their pipes. These they lighted, and held firmly in their teeth; then they marched up to the Chinamen's shafts, and pausing at one, watched the man at the windlass pulling up the buckets. The Chinamen spoke not a word; the new-comers spoke not a word. For full five minutes this was the state of things, and the Chinamen proceeded with their work sullenly; from screeching magpies they were transformed into mute submissive slaves. Wrath and rebellion may have been in their hearts; but outwardly they were the humblest of mortals. They cursed their ill-fortune, for it happened that, when the Tipperary men appeared on the scene, they were pulling up wash-dirt, in which specks of gold could be seen; but they cursed in silence.

"How deep, John?" then asked one of the Tipperary men. He referred to the depth of the shaft at which the Chinamen were working.

John did not reply. Be it here understood that on the Australian gold-fields all Chinamen have but one name—John—not given to them by their godfathers and godmothers.

The Tipperary man repeated his question:

"How deep, John?" John preserved silence. The Tipperary man and his mates followed suit for a few seconds. Presently they broke cover again:

"M'lenty gold, John?" M'lenty meant plenty; this was everywhere recognized as Chinamen's English.

"M'lenty gold, John?" John looked blankly into the face of his interlocutor. He understood perfectly the nature of the inquiries addressed to him, and was silent from a mixture of cunning, impotent anger, and helplessness.

The Tipperary man quietly knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and began cutting up cavendish tobacco with a great spring-knife. His mates followed his example; they knocked the ashes out of their pipes, and began cutting sticks of cavendish tobacco with great spring-knives. There was a wicked click in their knives as they opened them. The Chinamen's eyes grew white, and they sighed for thunderbolts or lightning to strike these desperadoes into ashes, or for some secret and as effectual means for getting rid of them. The Tipperary men filled their pipes again, stuck them between their teeth firmly, applied a match to them, and puffed away till they were well lighted. Then the man who had spoken took the Chinaman's ear between his fingers, and another Tipperary man laid hold of the handle of the windlass; the Chinaman was whirled aside, screaming and chattering; a third Tipperary man put his foot into the bucket which was about to be sent empty to the bottom of the shaft, and grasped the rope above him with one firm hand; the second man, working the windlass, slowly unwound the rope and let his mate down the pit.

The screams and chatter of the Chinaman who had been whirled from the windlass brought all his companions to the spot. They formed quite a small colony of twenty-two souls. The Tipperary men would have grinned had they been told that they were surrounded by twenty-two souls. They knew as much of theology as a laughing jackass did; but, had they been put to it, they certainly would have denied, with powerful emphasis, that Chinamen have souls. They saw around them twenty-two pasty faces, and twenty-two bodies dressed in blue dungaree; had the Chinamen turned their backs, the Tipperary men would have seen twenty-two pig-tails dangling from the crowns of the Chinamen's heads, and trembling responsively from agitation. One Tipperary man was hanging between heaven and earth, with his foot in a bucket; a second was letting him down the shaft, so that there were four Tipperary men left to confront twenty-two Chinamen. Long odds; but they did not seem to think so, did not seem even to consider that there was the slightest danger. Certainly they played



HIGH STREET, SILVER CREEK.

to climb this height on a moonlight night, and gaze at the perspective of snow-white roofs, beneath which the tired miners were sleeping, and at the silver stream of water threading its way through the undulations. Then there was the Government Camp prettily situated, and here and there clumps of silver-bark trees, and shadows of great ranges in the distance. Altogether it was a picturesque scene, and afforded food for the mind as well as the eye.

The Silver Creek diggings more than fulfilled the promise of its name, for gold was found in its soil instead of silver. It was first discovered by Chinamen, who, working there undisturbed for a few weeks, and getting much gold, screeched like magpies when they saw six Tipperary men march on to their diggings and stick their picks into the ground. The following was the order of the proceedings of the Tipperary men: They first stuck their picks in the ground, at a distance

branches in slanting devious lines, which, as you moved, darted hither and thither, as though imbued with life. The ground was all in shadow, and so solemn was the stillness and so dim the light in this space, that it seemed like a page out of another existence. Lost in admiration, Mr. Hart paused for a while, and then plunged into the second thicket, and found it denser than the first. In a quarter of an hour he emerged into the open unobscured sunlight again. Before him rose a vast range covered with quartz. He considered within himself whether it was worth the climb to climb this range; the quartz had been tempting, and he had heard that the richest reefs were sometimes found on such heights; it seemed to him as though it had never been prospected. He decided that he would mount the range.

It was a difficult task that he had set himself; the range was longer, steeper than he had imagined, and the day was very hot. He was compelled to stop and rest. "Shall I go to the top, or turn back?" he asked of himself. He was inclined to retrace his steps, until he thought of his darling at home: he took her picture from his pocket, and kissed it many times. "I will go up," he said, "to the very top. I might hear one day that a golden reef had been found on the summit of this very hill, and then I should never forgive myself." Little did he suspect how much hung upon that moment of hesitation. Little did he suspect that simply by mounting this hill, the means of bringing into his daughter's life its greatest joy and happiness were to be put into his hands. But even had he suspected it, his wildest dream would not have afforded a clue to the manner of its accomplishment; and yet he himself was to be the man who was to bring it about.

He mounted the hill; he reached the summit. Then he found that others had been before him. A shaft had been sunk: a windlass was erected. Mr. Hart judged from the great hillock of earth by the side of the claim that the pit could not be less than a hundred feet deep. A tree, split in two, was on the ground close by, with its inner surfaces exposed.

Mr. Hart went to the windlass, thinking at first that the claim was a deserted one, for he saw no person on the hill. But the sound of metal upon stone which came to his ears from the bottom of the shaft was sufficient to convince him that his idea was wrong.

A little heap of quartz lay within a yard or two of him. He examined it, and found gold in it. He took up piece after piece, and in every other piece there were traces of gold. He cast greedy glances, not at the quartz he was examining, but along the brow of the hill, beyond the boundary pegs which marked the area of the prospector's claim. Then, turning, he jumped back with a loud cry, for a man was lying on the ground at his feet, and he had almost trodden on his upturned face. But another thing that he saw held him for a moment motionless from fear.

The man was asleep, and in his hair was moving a long brown reptile, with, as it seemed, numerous legs, which were all in motion, stealthily and venomously. Two slender horns protruded from his head, and behind the horns his eyes gleamed with spiteful fire. Mr. Hart knew immediately that it was a centipede—a very large one of its species—and that its sting might bring death to the sleeper. It had crawled out of the centre of the split tree which lay near, and was now crawling from the hair onto the face of the sleeping man. Taking his handkerchief in his hand for protection, Mr. Hart, with a swift and sudden movement, plucked the crawling reptile from the sleeper's hair, and threw it and his handkerchief a dozen yards away.

"Halloo, mate," cried the man, aroused by the action, and jumping to his feet, "what are you up to?"

He was a young and handsome man, with a noble beard hanging on his breast, and with his hair hanging almost to his shoulders. His eyes were blue, his hair was brown. His skin was fair, as might be seen, not in his face, nor on his neck where it was bared to the sun, but just below the collar of his light-blue serge shirt, the top button of which was unfastened. In age probably twenty-five or six. In height, five feet ten inches or thereabouts; a model of strength, beauty, and symmetry. Such a form and figure as one of the old painters would have loved to paint, and as might win the heart of any woman not in love and that way inclined—as most women are, naturally.

Impetuous, fiery, aggressive, his first thought was that the stranger had attacked him in his sleep. He did not wait for a second thought, but pulled a revolver from his belt, where it was slung covered by a leathern sheath, and leveled it at Mr. Hart. In new gold fields, these weapons were necessary for self-defense; like vultures after carrion (although the simile does not entirely hold good), the most desperate characters fly to new gold fields on the first scent of gold, resolved to get it by hook or by crook.

Mr. Hart held up his hand and smiled deprecatingly. "I think I have done you a service, young sir," he said. "I saw a centipede crawling in your hair on to your face as you were lying asleep, and I plucked it away. That is all. I was once stung in the arm by one, and was disabled for three months, and I fancied you might not relish a like experience. Your face is far too handsome to be spoiled in that way. If you will lift my handkerchief gently and carefully—I did not care to seize the beast with naked fingers—you will see for yourself."

The young man had no need to lift the handkerchief. The long ugly thing was wriggling out of it; half its body was exposed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young man, seizing a spade and cutting the creature in a dozen pieces, all of which immediately began to crawl away in different directions, north, south, east, and west, with the intention of commencing independent existences.

V.

PHILIP'S RIDE FOR FLOWERS FOR MARGARET.

"THANK YOU," said the young man to Mr. Hart. "Thank you," returned Mr. Hart, dryly, "for cutting up my pocket-handkerchief."

The young man laughed. "Take mine," he said, offering a red silk handkerchief to Mr. Hart. Red was a favorite color in the diggings in the matter of personal adornment. Red handkerchiefs, red scarfs and sashes, red tassels and bindings, were much coveted.

Mr. Hart shook his head. "No; I will keep my own, as a remembrance." He gazed admiringly at the young man, and with curiosity, for he saw that the young fellow was superior to the general run of gold-diggers.

"What are you looking at?" asked the young man, merrily.

"At an anomaly."

"That's me."

"That is you. What made a gold-digger of you?" The young man shrugged his shoulders. "A thirst for freedom and adventure. I was cramped up in the old country, so I thought I would come where there was room to move and breathe."

"You find it here?"

"Rather!" He inflated his lungs, and expelled the air with vigorous enjoyment.

"What part of the old country do you hail from?"

"There was an unconscious tenderness in their tones as they spoke of their native land."

"Devon—dear old Devon. Oh, for a tankard of real Devonshire cider!"

Mr. Hart sighed. "You have homelike, then."

"Yes, I have an old father at home, who is old only in years. Let us drink to him." He took a tin sarsaparilla half filled with cold tea, and handed it to Mr. Hart, who drank from it, and returned it. "He is about your age, I should say. Have you been long in the colony?"

"Seven years."

"Ah, I haven't served my apprenticeship yet. Now, what brought you over these hills to-day?"

Mr. Hart stammered and hesitated; no man on the gold fields liked to confess that he had been wasting hours and days in the wild hope of discovering a golden reef, simply by wandering about and chipping up stones, although every man did it at some time or other, in secret. However, Mr. Hart blurted out the truth.

"Well," said the young man, "that's the way I and my mate discovered this reef. We found a thin vein, with gold in it, cropping out on the surface, and we followed it down until we came to another vein about two feet thick, and this we are working now. We're down a hundred and two feet. You see we have about twenty tons of quartz up now; it will go about twelve ounces to the ton, I should say. But we're stuck for a machine to crush it."

"There's one being put up in Iron-bark Gully."

"Yes; that's nine miles off," said the young man, fretfully; "how are we to get the stone to the machine, over the ranges, unless we carry it on our backs? That's a nice job that would be, and would cost as much as the stone's worth!"

"When Mahomet found that the mountain wouldn't come to him—," Mr. Hart said, and paused.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young quartz miner, "you're a gentleman. It does one good to talk to a man who can talk. Well, then Mahomet went to the mountain. That is to say, as we can't take the stone to a machine, we must bring a machine to the stone. But that would cost money, and we're on our beam-ends."

"Many a gold-miner has been in the same strait—with wealth at his feet, staring him in the face, and no money in his pocket—a rich beggar."

Mr. Hart considered. Should he offer his savings for a share in the claim? He had a hundred and twenty pounds in the corner of his trunk. The chances seemed a good one. He made the offer. The young man laughed at him.

"We should want twenty times as much," he said.

"I shall mark out a claim for myself, then," said Mr. Hart.

"All right, mate; but you'll have to go a mile away for it. The reef is pegged, north and south, for quite that distance."

This was true; Mr. Hart gave up the idea. He looked at the sun, and saw that if he wished to get back to the theatre in time for the performance he must start at once. He bade the young man good-day.

"What's your hurry?"

Mr. Hart explained.

"By Jove!" cried the young man, his face flushing scarlet. "I thought I recognized your face. How I should like to go behind the scenes!"

"Come then; I shall be glad to see you. This will admit you." And he took a card from his pocket, and wrote some words in pencil upon it, "What name shall I say?"

"Rowe."

"Here you are, then. Admit Mr. Rowe by the stage-door. Hart's Star Dramatic Company.—Signed JOHN HART."

"You're a brick. I'll be there to-night."

He was as good as his word. What made him so eager was that he had been to the theatre three times, and had fallen dead in love with the singing and dancing Chambermaid. Such an opportunity to make her acquaintance was not to be thrown away. At eight o'clock he stood by the wings, as handsome as Apollo, as strong as Hercules. When he was introduced to the singing and dancing Chambermaid he was as shy as a sensitive plant, and would have looked foolish but that his beard prevented him. The chambermaid, as good a girl as she was beautiful, saw the state of affairs at once, and knew, by feminine instinct, that she could twist him round her little finger. Nevertheless, she fell in love with him. Nature will not be denied, and he was a man to be fallen in love with. Her name was Margaret. His was Philip.

After the performance, John Hart and Philip Rowe had a glass together. They spoke of the old country.

"I'll give you a toast," said Philip Rowe; "Here's to the Silver Flagon."

"To the Silver Flagon," responded John Hart.

Philip Rowe drank another toast, but did not utter it to Margaret.

He went to the back of the stage on the following night, and many nights after that, and made friends with the company. All the men liked him; he was free-hearted and free-handed. But the Leading Lady liked him most of all. It was incredible that a lady who enacted Pauline and Juliet, and Lady Macbeth should be overlooked for a chitling who played simple chambermaids, and could dance a little. But then Philip Rowe was blind—which was not a valid excuse for him. The Leading Lady would have been well content to receive the attentions of so handsome a young man, who was evidently a gentleman, and she snubbed Margaret one night, and was spiteful to her because of her good fortune. Rowe, going behind the scenes, found his Margaret in tears in a convenient corner. She had a spare half-hour, and he coaxed her to tell him the cause of her distress.

"Never mind, Margaret," he said, tenderly. "Don't cry."

She looked up shyly at this. It was the first time he

had called her by her Christian name. If brevity is the soul of wit, it is also frequently the soul of love. Margaret was comforted.

When Philip Rowe came face to face with the Leading Lady, he glared at her. She glared at him in return. He felt awkward, and hung down his head. Her glare was more potent than his; she had to glare often on the stage, and was an adept at it. Besides, her face was smooth; his was hairy.

Margaret coaxed him to do something that night; she knew where and how to plant a dagger in her rival's bosom. She whispered to him, and he ran out of the theatre in a glow of ecstatic delirium, for her pretty lips had almost touched his ear. Her warm breath on his neck made him tremble.

She had asked him to get a bouquet of flowers, to throw on the stage to her in the last piece, in which both she and the Leading Lady appeared. Flowers have before now been used for purposes as sharp.

But where to get the flowers? A bouquet of flowers was unheard of in Silver Creek township. Where to get them? Where?

Could Love not grow them?

Where to get them? Ah, he knew! There was a garden six miles away, on the main road to the metropolis. In less than two minutes he was in the saddle, galloping in that direction, and right in front of him, all the way, shone Margaret's face and Margaret's eyes and hair. No will-o'-the-wisp was ever more alluring. Margaret lurked in the bushes, glided among the trees, shone in the open spaces, and Philip's heart beat fast and joyously. The six miles of bush road, so soft and pleasant to the horse's feet, were soon traversed, and there was the garden with a few—not many—flowers in it. Philip Rowe leaped off his horse. A woman came to the door.

"Here, Jim!" she cried, to her husband, running into the house, thinking that a bush-ranger (*Anglicé*, highwayman) was paying them a visit.

Jim appeared, with a gun in his hand.

"Now, then?" he demanded, nothing daunted.

"Oh, it's all right, mate," said Philip; and in a few moments he explained the motive of his visit.

"About a dozen flowers done up in a bunch are all I want. This for them." He displayed two pieces of rich quartz, in which there were probably two ounces of gold.

Jim was agreeable, coveting the specimen; his wife was not, loving her flowers. But when Philip pleaded, and told his story, she relented.

"Oh, if it's for that!" she said, and took a good look at Philip, and thought that the woman was to be envied who had won so fine a young fellow.

While she cut the flowers the two men had a nip of brandy each, which Philip paid for. The place really was a sly cross-shop.

Soon Philip was galloping back to Silver Creek township triumphantly. He arrived in time, and paid for admission into the body of the theatre, hiding the flowers in the breast of his dandy serge shirt. He was a bit of a dandy in his way, and especially so when he expected to see Margaret. He followed her instructions to the letter; she had told him at what point to throw the flowers, and plump at her feet they fell, at the precise moment she desired. The audience stared at first at the unusual compliment, and then applauded loudly. The Leading Lady turned pale, and clutched at her bosom tragically. The dagger had been deftly planted, and she felt the smart—as only a woman would feel it. Margaret placed the flowers in the bosom of her dress, and sent a look straight into the eyes of Philip, which made every nerve in his body tingle.

VI.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE Leading Lady was fond of money, and the theatre was doing so well that her dividend every week was a very handsome one, three times as much as she could expect to get elsewhere; but what woman is prudent when her vanity is hurt! A man with a large bump of caution occasionally hangs back, and calculates consequences. A woman never does. The Leading Lady, in a towering passion, confronted Mr. Hart, the manager, at the end of the performance.

"Here comes a tragedy," thought he, as he looked into her wrathful eyes.

"I leave the company!" she said, abruptly, with heaving bosom.

"My dear lady!" remonstrated the manager.

"To-morrow. I shall take a place in the coach that starts at eight o'clock."

She knew well enough what the result would be if she left; the company would collapse. A man might be spared, and his place filled, or his parts doubled, but the loss of a woman would inflict irreparable injury upon the prospects of the company. Mr. Hart knew this also.

"You don't forget," he said, gravely, "that we have your signature, and that if you leave we can make you pay heavy damages."

"That for my signature! that for your heavy damages!" Each time she snapped a disdainful finger.

"My dear lady," he said, in a soothing tone, "you are excited, you are overstrained. We have taxed you a little hardly. We'll play light pieces for a night or two, and give you a rest."

"You'll play no light pieces to give me a rest! Play light pieces, and give her the opportunity of taking leading characters! The shameless hussy! Not if I know it!"

Mr. Hart began to understand. This colloquy was taking place on the stage; the theatre was clear, the curtain was up. Down the stairs which led to the ladies' dressing-room, tripped Margaret, fresh and bright, and happy, with her bunch of flowers in her hand.

"Good-night, Mr. Hart," she cried, gayly.

In the shadow of the door which led on to the stage a man was waiting for her—Philip. They walked out, side by side, chatting confidentially. The Leading Lady saw this, and her anger rose higher; but still it was bitter gall to her to reflect that if she went away, the field would be clear for her rival.

Mr. Hart felt that he was on the horns of a difficulty; he could spare neither one nor the other of the ladies.

"You're the manager," said the Leading Lady, "and you ought long ago to have put down such shameless goings-on. We shall be the talk of the town; but I'll not be implicated in it. My name mustn't be used lightly." The manager smiled grimly. "I leave to-morrow. Understand that."

Philip was waiting for her—Philip. They walked out, side by side, chatting confidentially. The Leading Lady saw this, and her anger rose higher; but still it was bitter gall to her to reflect that if she went away, the field would be clear for her rival.

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"I decline to understand it. You will fulfill your engagement, and if it is necessary for me to take steps to prevent your departure, I must do so for the sake of others. I will swear a declaration against you."

He was aware that he was talking the most arrant nonsense, but he relied on the feminine mind to assist him with its fears, and with its ignorance of legal subtleties.

"I shall be sorry to do so against a lady whom I esteem and respect so much, and of whose talents I have so high an opinion, but no other course will be open to me. Why, my dear lady," he said, cunningly, "you know as well as I do that we are nothing without you—that you are the soul of the company—that there is not your equal in the colony."

The Leading Lady began to soften beneath the influence of such gross flattery, but it would not do to give way at once.

"I will not stop to be insulted."

"No one shall insult you."

"But some one has, and she shall not do so again—no, not if you swear a million declarations!"

"Come, now, tell me all about it," said the manager, taking her arm, and walking slowly with her up and down the stage. "By-the-way, Mr. Simpson, the Warden of Moonlight Flat, said last night, when you were playing Ophelia—you know him; he was in the theatre with the Commissioner of the Gold-fields and the Resident Magistrate—"

"Yes, yes," said the Leading Lady, impatiently, "what did he say?"

"That your Ophelia was equal to anything he had seen in London on the stage, and that he believed you would create a sensation there. He is first cousin to the Earl of Badmington, you know. I thought you would like to hear it."

He glanced slyly at the Leading Lady, whose head was nodding gently up and down, in sweet contentment.

"And now, my dear lady, tell me your grievance."

"It's yours, as well as mine, but if you like to stand it, I shan't. If bouquets of flowers are to be thrown on the stage, they must be thrown to me—do you understand, sir? to me, as the leading lady, and as the star of the company."

It happened that Mr. Hart had been busy elsewhere during the episode that had very nearly brought the ship to wreck, and had heard nothing of it. He asked the Leading Lady for an explanation, which was given to him.

"And if you don't stop these shameful goings-on," were the concluding words of her explanation, "I give you fair warning, I will not stay with you; I have a character to lose, thank God!"

Which was to be construed in so many queer ways, that for the life of him Mr. Hart could not help smiling.

"Well, well, my dear creature, I will see to it. And no flowers shall be thrown—by Mr. Philip Rowe, at all events—to any one on the stage but you."

This difficulty being smoothed over, he went in search of Philip Rowe, and found him leaning against a fence, outside the hotel, gazing up at a light in a bedroom window on the first floor.

"Rehearsing Romeo and Juliet?" asked Mr. Hart kindly, taking the young man's arm.

Philip blushed, and stammered some unintelligible words.

"That's her window, Philip," said Mr. Hart, "so you will not make the same ridiculous mistake as I did for a fortnight together, gazing up every night at the light in my lady's bedroom, and working myself into a state of gushing sentimentalism over the slender waist and the graceful turn of the head I saw shadowed on the blind, until I discovered that I had been watching the bedroom window of a black footman."

This was a piece of pure invention on the part of Mr. Hart.

Philip, having nothing to say in reply, shifted one foot over another restlessly. If he could have retired with a good face he would have done so, but Mr. Hart had hold of his arm. Mr. Hart continued:

"Putting sentiment aside, a nice scrape you were almost getting me into to-night. Ah, you may stare, but I should like to know what you mean by throwing flowers to my singing chambermaid—who is not by any means clever, let me tell you, and will never make her fortune on the stage—when we have in our company a lady who plays leading characters, and who knows every line of Juliet's part?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Philip; "Juliet was a girl of sixteen or seventeen, and your leading lady is forty."

"Woe for your life if you said so in her presence," exclaimed Mr. Hart, with a quiet chuckle; "it would not be worth a moment's purchase. Forty, sir! and what if she is forty—which she is not by five years? she is the only woman who can play Juliet to your Romeo."

"Hush!" whispered Philip. "She is opening the window."

Margaret, alone, in her white dress, was indeed opening the window. She did not know, not she—that her lover was below, nor that her form could be seen, for she had extinguished the light in the room; her shadow might be discerned, but what is there in a shadow? She sat down by the window and rested her head on her arm. The graceful outlines of her arm and neck and bended head were clearly visible, and the lover feasted his eyes upon them. She held in her hand the flowers which Philip had thrown her! Her lips were upon the tender leaves—sweets to the sweet. He saw her kiss the flowers, and his soul thrilled with rapture. The night was beautifully still; not a sound was stirring; and as far as eye could see the white tents of the diggers were gleaming. So Margaret sat and mused, and Philip looked on and dreamed. Here, in the new world, but yesterday a savage waste, the old, old story was being enacted with as much freshness as though the world were but just created. What wonder? Because the sun has risen a few millions of times, is the dew on the leaves less sweet and pure in the early morning's light than on that wondrous day when Adam awoke and found Eve by his side?

So Margaret sat and mused, and Philip looked on and dreamed; and I think that Margaret peeped between the lattice-work of her fingers, and saw with her cunning eyes that her lover was thus reposing himself.

How long they would have thus remained, Heaven only knows. Mr. Hart gave them at least twenty minutes, and then touched Philip's arm. Philip started, and Margaret at the window started also, and with a swift happy glance outward, and with a wave of the pretty hand and arm, closed the window. Philip was standing in the light, and Mr. Hart, like a kind and careful friend, had crept backward in the shade; so

that Margaret, when she cast that straight swift glance in her lover's direction, saw only him. Surely as the hand of love's white flag of recognition—waved toward him, it had touched her lips first, and she had sent a kiss into the air—what he received in his heart. It stirred tender chords there, and through his veins crept love's fever, which turns dress into gold, and makes a heaven of earth.

VII.

"AH, PHILIP, MY SON! I ALSO HAVE A GIRL WHOM I LOVE."

THEN said Philip, as he and Mr. Hart moved slowly away—then said Philip, as though but a moment had passed since his companion last spoke.

"Her name is Margaret, not Juliet. I have no need to play Romeo to Margaret," he whispered to himself, finding a subtle charm in the name; "My Margaret!" and then aloud, "Has your Leading Lady ever played such a character?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Hart, without any direct meaning, "in *Faust*."

Philip's face flushed scarlet, not at the words, but at the tone, which was sad and significant, without the speaker intending it to be so.

"I know you to be a gentleman—," pursued Mr. Hart, "I thought you to be one," interrupted Philip, hotly.

"I hope you will see no reason to change your opinion," said Mr. Hart.

"I see a reason already."

"Let me hear it," asked Mr. Hart, secretly pleased at the young man's ill-humor.

"You associated my Margaret's name—"

"Your Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Hart. "My Margaret, if you please."

"Mine!" cried Philip, in a loud voice.

"Mine!" echoed Mr. Hart, in a calmer tone.

"Call her down and ask her," demanded Philip in his rashness, without considering; and for the life of him, Mr. Hart could not help laughing long and heartily.

"Oh, that you were twenty years younger!" said Philip.

"Oh, that I were!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, with grave humor. "Then you would really have cause for uneasiness when you hear me call her mine."

"How do you make her yours?"

"I stand to her in the light of a father," replied Mr. Hart, more seriously. "When I persuaded her mother in town to let her accompany us, I promised that I would look after her and protect her. Therefore she is mine, because I am her father."

"And without any 'therefore,'" responded Philip, "she is mine, because I am her lover."

"Ah," said Mr. Hart, with a bright smile, "here is a case to be settled, then. But if every pretty girl was her lover's, then one might belong to fifty, or more, for there are hearts enough. Why, do you know how many men in Silver Creek might call you Margaret theirs by the same right as that by which you claim her?"

"No," said Philip, a little sulkily. "I don't know."

"Then I'll tell you. To my certain knowledge, sixty-nine; to my almost as certain conviction, some five hundred. She had forty-two offers of marriage the first week, and has had twenty-seven since. Come now, divide her between the sixty-nine lovers who have declared themselves, what part of her is yours?"

"You talk nonsense," said Philip, roughly.

"Well, suppose you talk sense," said Mr. Hart, blandly.

"It's hardly believable," cried Philip, clenching his fist. "Sixty-nine offers of marriage! She never told me, and I'm her lover."

"She has told me, and I'm only her father."

some one in her place; and do you suppose I'll stand quietly by, and see that done? Besides, think of the money Margaret herself is saving—

"That for the money!" said Philip, with a snap of his fingers. Money-making's a man's business, not a woman's."

"That's true. But leaving Margaret out of the question, there are persons in our company the happiness of whose life hangs upon their being able to save a certain amount of money within a certain time. Not only their happiness, but the happiness of helpless ones who are dearer to them than their heart's blood, depend upon this."

"By Jove! you speak strongly. Mention one of them."

"One of them stands before you now." Philip turned and looked Mr. Hart straight in the face. Tears were gathering in the old man's eyes, and the young man turned away again, so that he should not see them.

"Forgive me, mate," he said softly. "I'm wrapped up in my own happiness, and I'm forgetful of the feelings of others."

"Ah, Philip, my son!" There was so tender an accent in the old man's tone, that the tears rose to Philip's eyes as well. "I also have a girl home whom I love. See here, my dear boy. This is my daughter. She is at home in England, and I am here sixteen thousand miles away."

He had taken the picture of his darling from his pocket, and he now handed it to Philip. The young man looked at it in the clear moonlight. A round fresh face, open mouth with rosy lips, bright ingenuous eyes, fair curls around her white forehead. She was standing within an ivy porch, and one little hand was raised as though she were listening.

"It was taken seven years ago," said Mr. Hart; "she was twelve years old then."

"She is beautiful, beautiful!" exclaimed Philip, enthusiastically. "And you haven't seen her since then?"

"No—and my old heart aches for a sight of her. This money that I am earning will take me to her." "By Jove! and I was going to step in your way!" Brute that I was! Margaret shall stop. I'll wait till the end of the time. I can see her every night; and I can build a wooden house for her in the meantime. God bless you, old boy! Give me your hand again. Next to my own father, you are the man I love and respect the most."

VIII.

"GOD BLESS EVERYBODY."

"But I haven't finished yet," said Mr. Hart, after a short pause. "I've another condition."

"Another?" exclaimed Philip, with an inclination to turn ill-humored. "You are insatiable! And how many more after that, pray?"

"None."

"That's a mercy. Out with your last condition—which I'll not comply with."

"Which you will comply with. Where did you get those flowers from?"

"Where did I get them from? I rode a dozen miles for them—and I'd ride a thousand if she bade me."

"Or fly to the moon, or swim, or dive in the fire, or ride on the clouds, no doubt!"

"Yes, if she wanted me. She has but to speak."

"Quite right," said Mr. Hart, turning his face from Philip, so that the smile on his lips should not be seen; "but that's not my concern. This is. Mind what I say, sir. I'll have no more flowers thrown to my singing Chambermaid."

"Oh," retorted Philip, "now it's you'll not have this, and you'll not have that! Very well, then. I wish you good-night."

And off he walked, taking huge strides purposely, and stretching his legs to their utmost.

"No, no, Philip!" cried Mr. Hart, running after Philip, and laughing heartily at the wit of the retort. "No, no, I'm serious."

"And so am I," said Philip, stopping so that Mr. Hart might come up to him. "No more flowers, eh? Why, I'll smother her with them every night. I'll compel you to engage some one to carry them off the stage. No more flowers! I'll show you! Why, I'm going to scour the country for flowers, and I shall set seeds all round my tent."

"If you'll wait for the flowers to grow, I shall be satisfied. You can't make them come up by blowing on them with your hot words and hot breath. But seriously, Philip, there *must* be no more flower-throwing."

Briefly he explained the reason why, and the upshot of it all was that Philip promised. Then Mr. Hart said that Philip had better return with him to the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle Hotel; it was too late for him to walk back to his reef.

"I can give you a shake-down in my bedroom," said Mr. Hart.

"All right!" said Philip, and thought with ecstasy. "I shall be near Margaret; I shall sleep under the same roof as Margaret."

"Have you anything to drink?" asked Philip, when they were in Mr. Hart's room.

Mr. Hart wanted Philip to sleep in his bed, which was but a stretcher, barely wide enough for one, but Philip would not hear of it; so they got a straw mattress, and laid it on the floor, and Philip tossed off his clothes, and stretched himself upon his hard bed (and slept upon it afterward as though it were eider-down), in a state of complete satisfaction with himself and every one in the world. It was while he was lying like this, and while Mr. Hart, more methodical than his companion, was slowly undressing himself, that Philip had asked if he had anything to drink.

"I'll get something," said Mr. Hart, and left the room, and returned with a bottle and glasses.

While he was gone, Philip looked about him, and soon discovered that his Margaret's bedroom was immediately above him. He gazed at the ceiling with rapture, and sent kisses thitherward. A single partition parted him from his sweetheart. He fancied that he could hear her soft breathing. The same roof covered them. It was as yet his nearest approach to heaven.

"Here's to Margaret," said Philip, holding up his glass.

"To Margaret," responded Mr. Hart, "and happiness to you both."

"Another toast," said Philip: "To my old dad and the dear old Silver Flagon."

They drank the toast.

"What is the Silver Flagon?" asked Mr. Hart.

"One of these days perhaps I'll tell you," replied Philip.

But Philip never told him. One of these days Mr. Hart found out for himself.

The light was put out, and Mr. Hart knelt by a corner of his stretcher, and prayed for a few minutes. He was praying for his daughter. Philip saw the shadow of the kneeling man; it made him very tender toward Mr. Hart.

"Heaven that I am!" he whispered to himself. "I haven't knelt at my bedside for many a long month." Then he prayed in silence, without getting out of bed.

"Are you comfortable, Philip?" asked Mr. Hart presently.

"I am very happy," replied Philip. "Good-night—God bless you."

"And you, my boy. Good-night."

Philip thought, "I am glad my Margaret has had such a protector. God bless everybody!" The next moment he was asleep.

He was up an hour after the sun, and off to his reef. Things were looking well there. Mr. Hart had spoken to the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle, whose name by the way, as something has to be said concerning him, it may be as well to mention. You will have heard it before—it was Smith. Mr. Hart had spoken to Mr. Smith about Philip's reef, saying what a pity it was that there was no crushing-machine near such rich stone, and what a fortune a man might make who had money and enterprise enough to erect one. Mr. Smith had both. Four years ago, he was a bricklayer in the old country, and one day, for want of something better to do—he was out of work at the time—he emigrated. This is a literal fact. He arose early in the morning, with no intention of going away; strolled to the London Docks, and saw a ship making ready to start; was told that it would sail for Gravesend in the afternoon; inquired the price of a steerage passage, and found that he had just money enough in his pocket, and a trifle over, the scrapings and savings of ten years' bricklaying; had a chat with an enthusiast, who painted Australia in the colors of the rainbow, and then painted England in ditch-colors. Mr. Smith considered. What was the use of grinding one's life away in such a country as England? What was there to look forward to, to hope for, to work for? A poor man's grave. Born a bricklayer, died a bricklayer; that might be his epitaph, if he left money enough to pay for one.

"I should like to go with you," said Smith. "Come, then," said the enthusiast.

"I'm afraid there's not time," said Smith; "there's my old mother. I couldn't leave without saying good-bye to her."

"What's your name?" asked the enthusiast.

"Smith," replied Smith.

The enthusiast gave a start, and uttered an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Smith.

"Nothing," said the enthusiast; "only I was thinking that I should like you to come."

"But how is it to be managed?" inquired Smith, glancing at the name of the vessel, with his mouth watering. It was a nine hundred ton ship, called *The Gold Packet*.

"But how is it to be managed?" asked Smith.

"I know emigrated a year ago, and he had to buy bedding, and tin cups, and soap and towels, and I don't know what all."

"I'll manage it for you," said the enthusiast. "You go home and say good-bye to your mother. Be back here at one o'clock. By that time I'll have your passage-ticket, and your berth, and everything ready for you. What do you say?"

"What do I say? There's my hand upon it, and thank you. I'll do it," and with quickened pulses he hastened home, kissed the amazed old woman, promised to send her plenty of money from Australia, and to make a lady of her in five years, and was back to *The Gold Packet* at one o'clock.

"You're a man of mettle," said the enthusiast; "you're the sort for the gold-diggings. You'll make your fortune there as sure as eggs are eggs. Here's your ticket. Come down stairs; I'll show you your berth and things."

"How much does it all come to?" asked Smith.

The enthusiast penciled some figures on a piece of paper, and gave it to Smith, who looked at the items and added them up. Everything was correct; he handed the enthusiast the money, and had exactly two shillings and fourpence left to conquer the new world with. Smith went down stairs (to speak courteously of the descent) into the den where the steerage passengers were packed, and the enthusiast showed him his berth, his bedding, his tin cups, and other necessary paraphernalia. The enthusiast showed these things to Smith, but Smith could scarcely see them, the place was so dark. Smith was not daunted because the place was dismal; it was because it was managed with men crying, and children screaming, and men growling. Smith's soul rose to the occasion; he had a spirit above a bricklayer's; with his passage ticket in his hand, and two shillings and fourpence in his pocket, he felt himself a king. When he went on to the deck, he did not see the enthusiast, but he did not miss him; he was so interested in what was going on about him, the hurrying to and fro, the shouting, the singing of the sailors, the hauling of ropes. In an hour the ship was off, winding its way through a very labyrinth of boats and ships and ropes.

Then Smith glanced at the passage ticket. "Halloo!" he said, "they've made a mistake in my Christian name. I'm William Smith, not John." (Let me mention here, briefly, that our Smith never set eyes again on the enthusiast, whose name also was Smith, prefixed by John. It was his passage ticket, indeed, that our Smith held in his hand. All the time he had been painting in the most glowing colors the splendid attractions of the gold-fields on the other side of the world, he had been filled with the most gloomy forebodings. His courage had failed him at the last moment, and seizing the opportunity which had so fortunately presented itself of giving the new world another Smith instead of himself, he had sold his passage ticket and bedding and cooking utensils to the bricklayer, and after receiving the money for them bade good-bye to *The Gold Packet* and all the fair promises it held out. What his two shillings and fourpence in his pocket, William Smith passed through Port Philip Heads, and from that day Fortune smiled upon him. In a fortnight he was on

the gold-fields; in six months he was a speculator; in twelve, he had saved a thousand pounds. And now he was proprietor of a fine hotel and a theatre, and had a dozen other irons in the fire, not one of which did he allow to grow cold.

I think I shall be pardoned for this digression. This story is of the mosaic kind, and although there are many strange bits in it—some somewhat weird, as will be seen—I hope none will be found incongruous, but that they will all fit in one with another, and form a complete whole.

Mr. Hart, then, had spoken to William Smith about Philip's golden reef, and what a chance there was for a crushing-machine. The same day William Smith walked to the reef, examined the stone, went down the shaft, chipped here and there, putting two or three bits of gold and stone in his pocket, as treasure-trove, came up from the hole, strolled about the locality, Argus-eyed, and made up his mind. He spoke it to Philip and his mate. Said he: "In three weeks I will have a machine erected here, with twelve heads of stampers, which shall be working day and night, and which shall crush fifteen tons of quartz every twenty-four hours. You have raised, I should say, about a hundred and fifty tons of quartz. You shall put half a dozen men at work in your claim—I will provide the money for their wages—and in these three weeks you shall raise another hundred tons. I will do this on the following terms: You shall contract to give me the first two hundred tons of quartz to crush, and I will contract to crush it at the rate of three ounces of gold per ton. (The shrewd speculator had seen clearly enough that there was plenty of gold in the stone to pay him, and leave a handsome margin; indeed, he calculated that the quartz already raised from the bowels of the earth, and lying on the surface of the claim, would yield not less than ten or twelve ounces to the ton.) The next two hundred tons I will crush for two and a half ounces of gold per ton; the next two hundred for two ounces per ton." (Some men are born with a genius for figures; William Smith was one; and he had already totted up in his mind that the crushing of these six hundred tons of quartz would bring him in no less than £6,000, and that it would all be done in fifteen days. His £6,000 would pay all the expenses of labor and the purchase and erection of the machine, which in little more than a fortnight after it was put up would stand him in nothing. There were many chances of this kind in the gold-fields for enterprising men.) "After that we can make new arrangements."

Philip and his mate jumped at the offer. Then practical William Smith, to their astonishment and admiration, told them that although he had been but a short time on the range—it could not have been more than three hours altogether—he had settled on the very spot where the machine was to be erected. He showed them the place. It was on the slope of a natural basin, which, with a little labor, could be made into a splendid reservoir for the rain. Here the machine was to be erected; here the dam was to be built; here the sheds for the washing-out and retorting of the gold were to be put up. All was arranged. The only thing that would be wanted was water. "Pray for rain," said William Smith; and fancying that he saw in Philip's face an intention to fall on his knees that instant, cried out in a fright, "Not now! not now! In a fortnight, when the dam is ready." So Philip deferred his prayers for two weeks.

Now, it was manifestly impossible to get a crushing-machine from the capital of the colony in time. But William Smith, when he made his offer, knew what he was about. He knew of a machine on a neighboring gold-field not many miles away, which had been erected in a foolish spot where it was practically useless for the quartz would not yield sufficient gold to pay expenses of labor. Those who had bought and erected the machine had done so on the credit of a small patch of gold which they had found, and which they thought would lead them to precious deposits. They found no more gold, or not sufficient to pay. They built castles in the air—which practical William Smith never did; he always went upon solid ground, and seldom made a mistake. Before he was two days older he had bought the machine for a quarter of its value, and fifty men were set to work on it, so that it was almost literally torn down. But he had an experienced man at the head of his workers, and everything was done right. Fifty more men were working at the reservoir, and on the very day succeeding the scene which had taken place between Philip and Mr. Hart, the first portion of the crushing-machine arrived on the ground. This kept Philip busy, and although he was burning to get away to his Margaret, he could not do so until the night. The first thing that he saw when he went behind the scenes was one of the flowers he had bought the night before. He raised his eyes from the flower to Margaret's face, for the flower was in her bosom.

"Ah!" he sighed, flushing with delight. Of such simple things are life's sweetest pleasures born.

The bunch of flowers had of course formed a fruitful subject for conversation among the men of the dramatic company, and of course Margaret was obliged to make a confidante of some one of her own sex. The Leading Lady was out of the question; so the First Old Woman, the mother of the baby, received Margaret's confidences, and being a good-hearted, unselfish creature, and delighted at the opportunity of indulging in a little bit of matchmaking, she listened, and smiled, and congratulated the young girl.

"To-morrow it is Saint Valentine's day," she sang. "Now read my letter."

"I can't see it," placing her eyes close to it; "it's too dark."

"You've come to Silver Creek for something. Here my dear, nurse my baby and get your hands in."

Which caused Margaret to blush furiously.

"Oh," cried Margaret, "but there's been nothing said between us!"

"Nothing, my dear!" exclaimed the First Old Woman, with a mischievous laugh. "Really nothing?"

"Well, nothing very particular."

"Indeed!" said the First Old Woman, with good-humored sarcasm. "Is coming behind the scenes every night saying nothing? Was throwing you the flowers saying nothing? Was standing outside your window last night for a full hour and a half—I saw him with my own eyes, my dear!—was that saying nothing? I declare, then, I shall set my cap at him; I may as well take a chance in the lottery. He's a handsome young fellow as ever walked in two shoes, and if you intend to disappoint him—"

"Oh, but I don't," interrupted Margaret apprehensively.

Whereupon they fell to kissing one another, and baby came in for her share.

IX.

"I AM GOING TO SPEAK OUT," SAID PHILIP.

When Philip made his appearance that evening behind the scenes, the First Old Woman smiled significantly at him, and once, of malice aforethought, she cried to him:

"Oh, dear me! I'm wanted on the stage! Hold my baby, Mr. Rowe, till I come off again."

And before he had time to utter a word, one way or another, baby was in his arms, and the mother darted away.

Philip was not ashamed of his burden; he nursed the little thing tenderly, and Margaret, who was on the stage at the time, looked at him furtively as he was kissing the mite, and her mind was in such a whirl, that for the first time during her engagement she forgot the words she had to speak. Little did the unconscious baby suspect the important part she was playing in the sentimental comedy.

Later on in the night, Philip said to Margaret, "I am going to speak out."

This was the very thing she was pining for, and now that her wish was about to be gratified, she cried, "If you dare, sir!" saucily, mischievously, coquettishly.

Then what did Margaret do but lead him into a more retiring spot, where, if he did speak out, no one but herself could hear him.

"If you dare, sir!" she repeated, with a smile which magnetized him. But there was no occasion for that; he was bewitched already.

"Call me Philip," he entreated.

"Philip," she sighed. It was like the whisper of a rose.

He was radiant; the joy in his heart was reflected in his face. He toyed with her fingers. Never were chains more potent.

"What is that in your hand?" said she.

"A letter."

"To me? Give it to me!" She held out her little hand eagerly.

"It is not for you."

"Oh, indeed!"

She tore her fingers from his grasp, for he had taken them and kissed them.

"But you may read it."

She nestled to him again, and looked remorseful. When she pleaded mutely for forgiveness, with her pretty face upturned to his, what would you have done? He did what you would have done—and did it again—and again—and—

"No, sir," she cried, putting her hand upon her lips.

"No, Philip, I mean. You shall not—you must not: some one will be coming this way—"

There was nothing for it, as her lips were covered, but to kiss her neck; and he did so, until she lay in his arms panting.

"You frighten me," she sighed; "and if you are not still, I'll run away."

And she meant it. She had been made love to a hundred times upon the stage, but those were sham engagements, and her gentle breast was not fluttered by them, nor was her sweet nature spoiled by them. This sort of thing was quite different.

"And I've a great mind to be angry with you," she said, not moving from his embrace.

"Why?"

"You have brought me no flowers."

"Be angry with me after you have read my letter."

"How can I read it when you will not let me go?"

Certainly his arms were round her, but she did not make the least effort to get away from them.

"Shall I let you go?"

"If you like."

"I don't like."

He pressed her closer to him.

"Tell me, first, how you got my flowers last night."

"Why, you puss, I have told you twice already."

"I forget it; I want to hear it again."

Such small deceptions are permissible between lovers, when they are used to such felicitous purpose. He told her again, and her bosom panted, and her heart beat, and a proud and tender light shone in her eyes as he described the mad gallop he had taken; how he had won the flowers; the way the woman had said, "Oh, if it's for that!" and then the ride back, singing as he rode.

"Singing!" she exclaimed, interrupting him. "Oh, you didn't tell me that last night. I knew you had left something out."

"I did sing, and the trees heard me."

"What song was it, sir?"

"Philip."

"Philip, then. What song did you sing?"

"No song at all—yes, the sweetest song. A song with only one word to it."

"With only one word to it? Dear me! I know some, and I don't know that—and the sweetest song, you say!"

"The sweetest, the dearest, the best word in the world."

"What word was it?"

"Margaret—Margaret—Margaret!"

"Oh, Philip! And everybody heard it!"

"I left it behind me—no, I didn't; I wouldn't part with it. Part with it? Never, while my heart beats!"

Yet I did lose it, too, for an echo stole it—and I heard it singing Margaret as I rode on."

They were talking together in the open; there was a light in the sky, but the moon had not yet risen. Ten minutes afterward he said:

"Now read my letter."

"I can't see it," placing her eyes close to it; "it's too dark."

"Not for my eyes." He bent his head to hers; their cheeks touched.

"Dear madam," he commenced, "my name is Philip Rowe."

"What a stupid commencement!" she said, laughing.

"Is it? Wait. Perhaps it will improve farther on."

"My name is Philip Rowe. I am twenty-six years of age, and I am an Englishman, born in Devonshire. I have a half share in a rich claim on a rich quartz reef. I love your daughter—"

"Oh, oh!" she cried, trembling from happiness. "It's to my mother! And you're from Devonshire! Mother has friends in Devonshire. I've never been there. Go on, Philip. I love your daughter." Do you, do you, Philip?

"Do I, my darling?" he said, passionately. "Listen to my heart. What does it beat but Margaret, Margaret? I came here to find my life, and I have found her. I love you with all my soul. I never knew what a beautiful thing life was until I saw your dear face."

This was heaven to her to hear. Presently, "Go on! Philip. I love your daughter."

"And she loves me."

"Oh, Philip! who told you? What are you doing, sir?"

"I am listening to your heart, my darling."

"And what does it say? As if it could speak! What does it say, sir?"

"I think I hear it. I think it beats for me."

So inexpressibly tender was his tone that her arms crept round his neck, and she sighed, "It does, Philip; it does."

It was the proudest, happiest moment in his life. A blissful silence encompassed them.

"I haven't much more to read," he said; and added, cunningly, "Where did I leave off?"

"You know, Philip."

"No, but tell me."

"And she loves me," she whispered.

"My darling! I love your daughter, and she loves me. I cannot make a lady of her, for she is that already, thanks to you. Isn't that good?" he asked, breaking off.

"Yes. Go on! go on. I want to hear the end."

"I will do all in my power to make her happy; and I write, with her permission, to ask you to allow me to subscribe myself, in every letter that follows this, your affectionate son, Philip Rowe." There!

And how can you see to read such a bold letter, sir? My eyes are as good as yours, and there's no light."

"I did not read with my eyes, dear Margaret."

"With what then, sir? You're full of riddles."

"With my heart, my darling."

X.

"PRAY FOR RAIN, MY DARLING."

"We are getting along finely," said William Smith, rubbing his hands briskly as he looked around with satisfaction upon the busy scene. The crushing machine was nearly ready. It was a Berdan's, with twelve stampers to pound the stone to dust. The steam-engine was in fine order. The dam was built and ready for work.

William Smith had good reason to feel proud, for by his enterprise he had peopled this hitherto deserted spot. A hundred tents of drill, and a few more pretentious with walls built of slabs, were scattered about, and by a wave of his hand three hundred strong men had found profitable employment. Some had their wives with them, and goats and children scampered about the gullies and over the adjacent hills.

The stores, the principal one of which and the most favored by the diggers belonged to William Smith, were doing a roaring business. A wise man, William Smith, no half-hearted worker; what he did was thoroughly done. He was an honest, straightforward man too, driving a hard bargain always, and always to his own advantage; but those he dealt with had their gains also, and they knew that his words were to be depended upon down to the last letter. Wherever he competed he took the lead, and deservedly. His hotel was the best in Silver Creek; the best accommodation was to be found there, the best liquors were to be obtained there. His theatre was a model of comfort. His store on the Margaret Reef (I have not had time before to tell you that Philip had christened it the Margaret) was as complete as it was possible for a store on the gold-diggings to be. He sold the best of everything—the best and naggiest water-tight boots with square toes and clean-cut nails

pane covering its imperfections—covering also a life preserver and a revolver, which Philip had put out of sight. The chairs were two stools and part of the trunk of a tree, polished in its seat and of a comfortable height. You may be sure that everything was sweet and clean, or Philip would not have brought his Margaret there. She looked about in every corner, making grand discoveries and uttering little screams at this and that.

"I declare, sir," she exclaimed, "you are more comfortable than I thought you were. I wonder why you want to change."

"Wouldn't you," he asked, gayly, "in my place?"

She considered deeply, making wrinkles in her forehead. "No," she said, in a decided tone, "I really don't think I should. What do you say? Will you change your mind?"

He shook his head with fond seriousness. "My name is Constancy," he said; and was proceeding, when she interrupted him quickly with:

"Constancy's a woman; I'll take that name, if you please, sir."

All the time they were in the tent together he did not kiss her; a feeling of delicacy restrained him.

XIV.

NATURE PUNISHES THE THIEF.

THE festivities at the Margaret Reef did not conclude the celebration of the christening. In the night an invitation ball was given by William Smith to the nobility and gentry of the district. When he did a thing, he liked to do it completely. He had a marquee put up especially for the occasion, and so that the ladies might not think it a trade affair, he had asked permission to erect it on the ground where the Government Camp buildings were. It was a complete and most brilliant success. The Judge was there, and danced in the first quadrille, and so far forgot himself when he saw Margaret that he asked for the honor of her hand in the second: a proof that judges are human. If Margaret was lovely in the morning at the Reef, what shall I say of her in the night at the ball? and what shall I say of her dress? Again, but in a lesser degree, I lay myself open to the criticism of the ladies. Margaret's dress was composed entirely of clouds of fleecy tulle, looped and caught back by tufts of feathery ferns and grasses. And a long trail of bright grass was in her beautiful hair. This is all that I saw, for her charming face took away my eyes from all the rest, and I should scarcely have been surprised to see her floating away on a cloud. Entranced Philip was fairly dazzled by her appearance as she came sailing in on the arm of Mr. Hart, who looked what he was, every inch a gentleman. Everybody shook hands with everybody, as though they hadn't seen one another for weeks. When Mr. Hart resigned Margaret to Philip's care, Philip trotted on air. He danced with her, and afterward said:

"I shall keep possession of you the whole of the night."

Just then the Judge came up to her, and Philip moved a little aside, never thinking that so sedate a man, and one in such a position, would dance with a young girl like Margaret.

Now I am happy," said Margaret to Philip, after the dance. "I have danced with a judge; that's one of the things I shall never say, all my life. I've danced with a judge—I've danced with a judge!"

Then came another and a younger man, and Margaret waltzed away with him. Seeing jealousy in Philip's face, Margaret whispered:

"Be good. I love only you."

He tried hard to be good, but strive as he might, he could not help feeling a little bit wicked. But he contrived to obtain many crumbs of consolation during the night. Crumbs? Slices, I ought to say; for the night was lovely, and now and then between the dances Philip stole into the open with his sweetheart on his arm. Being in the shade once, he wanted to embrace her.

"Be quiet, sir," she said coquettishly. "I'm only to be looked at to-night. I mustn't be crushed."

"Why," answered Philip, with tender adroitness, "when I am dancing with you, I place my arm round your waist—so."

"Ah," she said, with a most delicious little laugh, "that's more neatly done."

"And my face is close to yours—so."

He had his way, and she became an accomplice. Being fired to emulation, she showed him that she was not to be outdone in tenderness. When a woman is in love, she forgets her cunning.

William Smith said rather a good thing. The Judge had a crisp short habit of speaking.

"I like that judge," said William Smith. "He must be a merciful man. He speaks in short sentences."

At midnight Smith came to the side of Philip, and pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock, and at that moment he had arranged that the William Smith quartz crushing-machine should be set going.

"They've commenced to dance," he said gleefully. He referred to the stamper's machine.

Philip, gazing at Margaret and a handsome partner, who were whirling away from him, muttered somewhat surlily:

"I see them!"

William Smith glanced at Philip in surprise.

"My imagination doesn't carry me as far as yours," said William Smith: "but I dare say you are as impatient as I am." Philip scarcely heard the words.

William Smith continued: "Mr. Hart and I are going to steal away for an hour; we shan't be gone longer. Play the host while I am absent, and if they ask for me, say I'll be back in a minute or two."

Philip nodded and presently Mr. Hart and William Smith were in the saddle, and galloped away over the hills in the direction of The Margaret Reef; the horses did the distance in twenty-five minutes.

"Do you hear them—do you hear them?" cried William Smith exultantly, as they breasted the hill.

The music of the stamper's fell on their ears. They halted at a distance of a couple of hundred yards from the machine. Sparks were flying from the chimneys; the fires were roaring; the machine was thumping away, beating the gold out of the quartz.

William Smith had good cause for triumph; many a man has won a name in history for doing less than he had done.

But in the midst of his exultation a tender sadness came upon him.

"What would you suppose I am thinking of?" he asked of Mr. Hart.

"I can't guess," replied Mr. Hart, who had thoughts of his own.

"I am thinking of my old mother at home," said William Smith, "and wishing she was here to see this day's doings. How proud she would be of her Billy, as she calls me!"

Mr. Hart was also thinking of a dear one at home, and of the time, soon to come he hoped, when he should fold her in his arms. He blessed the music of the stamper's; he gazed with tearful eyes upon the bright sparks flying upward from the chimneys. They would give him the means of seeing his darling daughter in her bloom of womanhood.

At that moment, also, Philip was talking to Margaret of his father.

So, beneath the stars, the old country and the new were joined by the tenderest heart-links that love can forge.

A word as to the money which had been stolen from Mr. Hart. The thief was no other than the Walking Gentleman and the Treasurer of the dramatic company. It has already been seen that he was ignorant of arithmetic; he might have pleaded this as an excuse, had he been called before a human tribunal to answer for his crime.

He carried out his character of Walking Gentleman consistently, by walking off with Mr. Hart's money and other money as well. But it was the last opportunity he had of playing a part on this earthly stage. He had planned everything carefully; he had so much money of his own; he appropriated Mr. Hart's savings, having learned where the trustful old man was in the habit of depositing them; he had, as treasurer, more than three hundred pounds in hand, belonging to the company. A ship was to sail from Hobson's Bay for England in four days; he could do the distance to the port very well in that time. Then on to the ship, and away for home, with nearly a thousand pounds of stolen money in his purse.

All was accomplished an hour before the storm; he played only in the first part of the performance on that night, and at nine o'clock he was off, dashing away from Silver Creek on the back of a fleet horse. He had taken the precaution to disguise himself, so that he might not be recognized. It was his intention to ride all night, and to catch up Cobb's coach at a certain point in the morning. All went well for an hour, but then the skies blackened, the thunder began to growl, the lightning to flash, and presently the storm fell upon him.

He went on, nothing daunted, thinking it impossible that such a downpour could last. But it did last, as we know, and increased in fury. The thief began to wish that he had chosen another night, and he cursed his bad luck; but curses did not avail him, and there was now no turning back. On he galloped, with his head sunk on his breast, and the heavy rain beat down on him, and caused a singing in his head. It was at first only an indistinct roar that he heard, but it took shape presently, and the words, "Thief! thief! fool! thief!" hissed and plashed in his ears.

Once, raising his eyes, he saw a tall thin form leaping out of his throat as he saw a tall thin form leaping out of his throat, bent by the force of the wind, and he escaped it without really knowing what it was. But every branch that swayed brought new terrors to him, and then he began to wish that he had remained honest; he was in the bush, with not a tent in sight, having chosen the remotest track, so that he might not be seen. But had a human habitation been within twenty yards of him he would not have been able to see it, for by this time he was enveloped in blackness. He stumbled on, not knowing now whether he was going.

For a little while he had strength and sense enough to keep a tight rein on his horse, but a frightful flash of lightning, and a more frightful peal of thunder, so unnerved him that the rein slackened in his grasp. The horse dashed madly forward—over fallen timber, through light thickets of bush, into great pools of water, that splashed up and blinded the runaway. The branches of the trees caught at his clothes and tore them in fragments from his body; his wig had been the first thing to go, and the brown paint with which he had striven to hide his villainy was washed from his face with, as it seemed to him, with the force of a flash of lightning, every flash of lightning caused him to scream with terror, as he clung with wild desperation to the horse's neck. Torn, bleeding, and literally in rags, with the stolen money in a belt fastened round his waist, he rode on madly a thief confessed. Louder shrieked the storm; over the ranges and through the uneven valleys dashed the maddened horse. A raging torrent was before them, and the animal leaped into it, and in the leap the thief was unhorsed. While he was struggling in the boiling water, and while the only thing that was certain was death in a few seconds, he repeated most heartily of his crime, and I leave it to priests to say of what value were the choking words and the agonizing thoughts that typified repentance. When the next flash of lightning lit up the wild scene it illumined the furious waters rolling onward, and, for the millionth part of a second, the lifeless body of a thief justly punished.

In this way he played his last part in life, and was never more heard of.

XV.

WILLIAM SMITH'S AMBITION.

MERRILY worked the William Smith quartz crushing-machine. Day and night the stamper kept thumping and pounding. The first rest given to it was when the first fifty tons of stone had been passed beneath the stamper. Then the iron baby was quiet for a while.

The iron cradles were emptied of their treasure in strong washing-tubs—hogheads sawn in two and made stronger by the blacksmith. The treasure consisted of finely pounded stone and water, among which rolled three or four hundredweight of quicksilver. No gold was to be seen; it was hidden in the quicksilver.

Now commenced the process of washing up. The deposit in the tubs was panned off in ordinary gold washing-dishes, the quicksilver with its precious treasure being put in a separate tub, and the waste earth which the quicksilver refused to embrace thrown aside in a little heap, as though it were of no account. This waste refuse was considered to belong by right to the proprietor of the crushing-machine, and consisted chiefly of iron pyrites; it was a valuable privilege, producing a good many ounces of gold to the ton sometimes. The quicksilver, having all been extracted, lay in a silky white mass in the large tub. The strongest man could not have lifted it. It was ladled carefully into skins of chamois leather, which, when fairly

filled, were squeezed tight over buckets of clear water. The quicksilver which did not contain gold oozed out in silver tears, and wept into the water; it might truly be said that it was alive, a *gentium vivum*; there then remained a thick solid mass of white metal. If you took up a handful of it, you could feel the beaten lumps and nuggets of gold which it concealed from view. The whole process was the retorting of the metals. The quicksilver and the gold were deposited in the retort, a spherical vessel, from the cover of which rose a slender curved tube, up which the heated quicksilver ascended, as smoke ascends from a chimney. This retort, with its precious treasure, was plunged into a fiery furnace, and heated to a white heat, and when the last few globules of pretty silver spray had fallen from the bended tube into the water, which lay to receive it, the retort was unscrewed, and a large mass of molten gold, lit up by the most lovely colors, that seemed to flash and play upon its breast with fairy's touch, was exposed to view. When Margaret, who was present, saw the pretty sight, she clasped her hands and cried, "O! O! O!" which round circles stand for as much delight and admiration as could be expressed in three pages. Philip and the rest looked on with sparkling eyes.

What's the weight of it?" asked William Smith. Philip, who was a novice in the matter of cakes of gold, guessed it at four hundred ounces.

"At four pounds an ounce," said William Smith, ever ready for a bargain, "that's sixteen hundred pounds. I'll give two thousand pounds for it as it stands."

Philip would have consented right away, but his more experienced mate laughed at William Smith, and with a knowing look said it would be a thousand pities to make him a loser by his enterprise. When all the rainbow colors had died out of the gold, and it had become solidified, the cake was put into the scales. It turned fifty-six pounds Troy—six hundred and seventy-two ounces. Deducting one hundred and fifty ounces, that being William Smith's payment for crushing the fifty tons of stone, at three ounces per ton, there remained five hundred and twenty-two ounces of pure gold, which Philip sold at sixpence less than four pounds an ounce, receiving in hard cash two thousand and sixty-six pounds nineteen shillings.

"Here you are, old fellow," said Philip to Mr. Hart, handing the old man two hundred and fifty-eight pounds odd for his eighth share; "now you can pay me the two hundred and fifty you owe me. I don't intend to wait three minutes for the money."

Mr. Hart paid Philip with a grateful sigh; he knew that it would be useless to remonstrate with the young man. Had Mr. Hart been alone in the world, with no ties, he would not have accepted of Philip's generosity; he would have quailed with him first. But you know it was with him, and you will not blame him, I am sure.

The theatre was open again, and was thronged as usual. The actors and actresses were much concerned as to the fate of the missing treasurer; none of them, with the exception of Mr. Hart, suspected him. (Mr. Hart had enjoined secrecy upon Philip and Margaret, and no one but the three knew of his loss.) As they never received any tidings of him, they settled that he had been lost in the storm, and they mourned him as one dead.

Silver Creek township thrived and flourished. New discoveries were made every week, and new leads of gold found in gullies and plains. William Smith, always playing his cards well, knowing that now the township was becoming a settled thing, there must soon be a government land sale, began to build and let, and to buy up rights of land wherever he could. Depend upon it he bought in the proper places, having settled after careful survey, where it was imperative that the streets would be laid out. You would have thought he had enough to do, what with one thing and another, but he seemed never to have his hands full. He was not of an envious disposition, but he did covet one thing—Philip's quartz claim. It was yielding finely, and he believed he saw a colossal fortune in it. Not to be made out of it in the way Philip and his mate were working it. No; he would put up machinery. He would sink new shafts. The stuff should be drawn from the bottom of the shafts, not by hand but by steam power; the men should be lowered by steam; he would have a steam-engine below, if it was necessary. Everything should be done by steam, and labor should be economized. Would that reduce the number of men necessary to work the claim? Not at all. Where there were a hundred men at work now, William Smith would have five hundred. What he would really would be to get ten times as much gold. He would open the claim to its fullest extent; he would buy up as many claims as he could get hold of north and south of him, and would pay for them all liberally.

You may ask why William Smith wanted to do this. He was making so rapid a fortune, that if things continued as they were for another twelve months, he would be at least a fifty-thousand pounds man. And in three years these figures would be doubled. A hundred thousand pounds! When he was a bricklayer at home working for a bare pittance, on high scaffolding at the risk of his life, the very idea of possessing such a sum would have been enough to take away his breath. Now he thought nothing of it. But he wanted Philip's claim. For this reason: he burned to be a master of men, not of twenty or fifty, or a hundred. He wanted to be a master of not fewer than five hundred men, all doing well under him, all living comfortably and being well paid, and if he had Philip's claim, he saw his way to it. Then when he went home to the old country, he could say to his old master, "You thought it a great thing to have eighty men under you? Why, I, one of these eighty, went into a new country and employed five hundred, and every one of them had a house of his own and was well clothed, and could give his family meat for breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper; and after paying for everything, and more besides, could put by thirty shillings a week in the savings bank—in the savings bank, which I started and am trustee of!" You see the old master used to cry out that workmen in the old country were better off than they were in any other part of the world. William Smith wanted to show him that he was wrong.

So William Smith yearned to be king of five hundred men, and the proper complement of women and children—to be the master of five hundred pairs of hands—to see peace and plenty and industry all about him—to walk among his workmen, and chat and smile with them—to walk among the women and children, and pat the youngsters on the head, and pass kind words

with the mothers. He had all these thoughts. It was not a bad ambition.

He offered money for Philip's claim—a very large sum. Philip and his mate shook their heads. Mr. Hart would have been glad to sell his share; if he had one eighth of what William Smith offered, the white sails should spread for him over the seas for Home, dear Home. But he decided that it would be base to sell; it would be like deserting Philip. "I'll wait yet a little while," he thought. "A few months will soon pass." William Smith tempted him. Philip stood by. Mr. Hart declined, and saw in the look of joy which flashed into Philip's face what pleasure his refusal had given the young man.

The largest retorted cake of gold that had been produced for many a score of miles around was produced from a great crushing out of Philip's claim. It weighed no less than two thousand two hundred ounces. It was exhibited in the principal gold-broker's window on a Saturday, which was the busiest day in the township. Then all the diggers and their wives and children came in from the hills and gullies, and made their purchases. A more bustling scene of its kind could not be witnessed in any part of the world. All day long the diggers and the women poured in, from east, from west, from north, from south. Where a store-keeper took ten pounds on another day, he took fifty on a Saturday. You should have seen the theatre on Saturday nights!

The people stood round and about the gold-broker's window, and those who were nearest stared and stared, and those who were farthest away peeped over their neighbors' shoulders at the great beautiful cake of gold, duly labeled. Two thousand two hundred ounces! It made one's mouth water.

But on the Monday morning following this splendid exhibition, Philip going to his claim—he had spent the Sunday with Margaret—found the workmen standing about, in consultation. Some part of the shaft had fallen in, and they were waiting to know what to do.

"Do!" exclaimed Philip. "Go down, of course."

And down he went, and made an anxious and critical examination. When he came up again he decided to get the government mining surveyor to report upon the condition of the shaft. This was done, and the surveyor gave certain directions. The shaft would have to be slabbled round all its sides for fifty feet from the surface—boxed in as it were. Until then it was not safe to work below. The slabbing was done; it occupied a week, and cost some money.

Philip fretted at the delay, and no one was glad but William Smith. He rejoiced. He had not one particle of malice in his nature, but he said quietly to himself, "Smith, I'd like that claim to cave in from top to bottom. Perhaps they'd sell it to you then."

Margaret heard of the disaster—from William Smith's lips, I think. She turned white, and clung to Philip on the night she heard the news. He was annoyed that she knew, but what was there to be frightened at, he asked.

"Frightened at!" she cried. "Oh, Philip, how can you ask? More of the shaft will fall in—"

"How do you know that?"

"I know it—I feel it. And you will be underneath, perhaps—"

She could not proceed for her terror. He could not but feel glad at this solicitude for him, and he used lover's arguments to prove that there was no danger. These arguments were sweet and delicious to her, but they had a contrary effect to that which he intended. Making her love him more, they made her more anxious for his safety.

"Promise me not to go down," she begged; "promise me to work at the top."

"And let another man be crushed in my place!" he said proudly. She shuddered, and held him closer to her. "Not if I know it!"

"Then you don't value my life?" she cried, with womanly tact and womanly unreason.

"Your life, my dearest! not value your life, when every hair of your head is precious to me!"

"No," she persisted, "you don't value my life, when you are determined to risk it in this way."

"What are you talking about, Margaret? I risk your life!"

"Yes," she cried, "you are about to do it. For if anything happens to you, I shall die."

He had to promise her that he would not go down below, but he did not keep his word. It was not often he broke it, but here his manhood was in question. He was not going to shrink from his fair share of risk. He did not deceive Margaret long, however. She coaxed Mr. Hart to take her to the Reef one day, and did not scruple to tell him that Philip expected her. When they arrived at the shaft, she found that Philip was below. White from apprehension, she walked a few yards away, and sat down upon the trunk of a tree, while the workmen, from a distance, gazed at her lithe and graceful form with respectful admiration.

"Phil Rowe's a lucky fellow," they said.

Mr. Hart passed the word down for Philip to come up, and up he came, strong and handsome, with the veins standing out on his bare arms and throat, a fair sight for a woman who loved him. But Margaret turned from him, and repulsed him, secretly admiring him all the while for his courage.

"This is the way that men deceive women," she said—promising one thing and doing another.

Had she been a scholar, she might have flung at him the proverb, "False in one thing, false in all," but she was only a woman in love. Besides, she would have known that there would have been no truth in the proverb, in this case; perhaps that would not have mattered, though. Women are queer logicians; their logic comes from the heart, not from the head.

"What can I do?" he asked, after listening to her reproaches. "You don't want people to think me a coward, do you?"

"If they dared to say so!" she exclaimed, with a motion which implied that she would defend him.

"They will say so if I do as you wish," he said; her hand was in his now; he did not mind the workmen seeing. "No, no, Margaret. Your word shall be law in everything but this. Women don't understand these matters." She tossed her head disdainfully.

"Besides, don't I want to grow rich for my Margaret's sake?"

"Rich!" she exclaimed. "Why, you have thousands of pounds!"

"I want thousands more to throw into your lap."

She wavered a little, for just three seconds.

"No," she said then, "you don't want thousands more, if your life is to be risked in the getting of them."

Philip, and she looked at him earnestly, "if you were a beggar, I should not care."

"Do you mean to say you would love me all the same?"

"Yes; and work for you, if it was necessary."

She meant it. However, she did not persuade him to act as she wished. But things were working in her favor.

Within a few hours of this conversation, Philip, still working below, made a discovery. They were preparing for the blast. He was holding the gad, while a workman was striking it on the head with his hammer. Half an inch this way or that, and Philip would have been maimed for life, but it was seldom a man was so unskillful as to cause an accident in this way. The hole for the gunpowder was two feet deep when Philip took out the gad and spooned the dust out of the hole. The dust came up this time in a liquid state. Philip looked anxious. When the hole was cleared, a little stream of water came bubbling up. They had struck water. It was not very serious at first. They continued working during the day, and fired the blast the last thing the evening, before knocking off work. When Philip went up to his waist in water, he was so angry, and bailed it out; more than half the working hours of the day were lost in this necessary labor. They dug a well, and so managed to keep themselves tolerably dry; but the water came in faster and faster.

William Smith smiled and rubbed his hands. The claim was already as good as his; he began already making bids for other claims, north and south. In his mind's eye he mapped everything out. He saw himself king of this great range. He saw a happy village springing up. Here should be this; there should be that. Tents for the diggers here; a wooden house for himself there. On this spot should be a church; on that a school-house. He saw a well-dressed and happy congregation, his workmen and their families, walking from the church on the Sabbath day, smiling and talking together; he saw the children trooping out of the school-house after school hours, and the school-master standing in the porch, with his cane under his arm; joy stirred in his heart as he fancied these things, and as he heard the shouts and hurrahs of the youngsters. There should be gardens too; yes, every tent should have its garden. He saw the cabbages and pease coming up; flowers also. He went to the highest point of the range, and folding his arms, looked down upon his kingdom. It had been a pleasure to him hitherto to make money, but he had not thought much of it. He had made it so easily, that his heart had scarcely been fluttered by the success of his speculations. But now, as he contemplated the realization of his pet scheme, money was really sweet to him for the first time.

The quartz crushing machine hammered away as steadily as ever. The water in Philip's claim increased in volume every day. It served one good purpose. A race was made from the shaft to the dam and a continuous stream of water was running down it.

"You ought to pay us for the water," said Philip's mate.

"You ought to pay me for taking it," said William Smith.

Matters were growing serious. Out of every twelve hours they could work in the quartz but three.

Yet I do not think that William Smith would have obtained the claim, if it had not been that a woman was on his side.

XVI.

MR. HART DECIDES TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER.

MARGARET had a tender, yielding nature, but she was firm withal. It is surprising how determined these soft weaker vessels can be! And they generally get their way. If men, in addition to their naturally greater strength of character, possessed woman's delicate cunning, great results would be accomplished. But men are deficient in *finesse*. The nature of many a great diplomatist has assimilated closely to that of a woman. A clever man can do fine things, but a clever woman, with the same opportunities, would beat him hollow.

"Am I not growing pale?" asked Margaret of Philip, in a plaintive tone.

Philip, gazing at her in tender solicitude, saw that she was a shade paler than usual.

"And thin, Philip. Feel my arm." He obeyed her. "I'm wasting away," she said.

Now, that Margaret was a little paler than usual is not to be disputed. She had contrived it; by what means I am not sufficiently in the mysteries to state. The story was very thin, I deny. Yet Philip thought differently from me. But he was in love with Margaret; while I—No, I must not write what was about to glide off my pen. The pen tells many untruths, and I will not add one to the number on this occasion. I do love Margaret a little.

"You are working too hard," said Philip.

"No, it is not that," sighed she.

"You want a rest, my darling."

"It would do me no good, Philip."

"You are worrying yourself about something."

She sighed. It was a most eloquent affirmative. Then Philip paused. He felt that he had touched dangerous ground. Seeing that Philip did not speak, she used her tongue.

"Yes, I am indeed worrying myself about something. It will be the death of me, Philip."

"Nonsense, my darling, nonsense."

"I should not speak of your death in that way, Philip!" He felt the ground crumbling beneath him.

"You are in low spirits, Margaret. You must rouse yourself for my sake."

She shook her head. "I seem to have no strength left, Philip."

"Ah, that's it," he said eagerly, catching at a straw; "you are weak and low; you must eat strengthening things."

"Soft-minded fellow!" as if, in her languid condition, she was not stronger than the strongest man!

"I had a dreadful dream the night before last, Philip."

"There! there! frightening yourself with fancies."

"They are killing me, Philip. I dreamed about you and the shaft. You were working at the bottom of it. I don't know where I was standing, but dreams are such curious things, you know, Philip. I was standing there, and I saw you below, and I saw the men at the top, also, working. I saw right down the shaft, Philip, and all at once there was a great crying and screaming, and the men flew wildly about. The shaft had fallen

in, and you were buried beneath tons and tons of earth. I could see you even then, holding out your hands to me, and crying to me to help you." Margaret's eyes were full of tears, and she shivered and cowered. And I declare I do not know how much of this was acting and how much was not.

What could a man do under this sort of persecution? What could he do but yield?

"But, Margaret," said Philip, "we are young, we are strong. It would be folly to go away from Silver Creek, where we are making so much money."

"I don't want to go away from Silver Creek," she replied, her heart beating a little more quickly. "I love the place; if it had not been for Silver Creek we might never have met, Philip. I can show you a way to make more money than you are making at The Margaret Reef. Ah, how good it was of you to name it after me! Yes, I can show you how to make more money."

"You, little woman, you! Why, what is there in that pretty little head of yours?" He took it between his hands and kissed her lips.

"Look straight into my eyes, Philip. Don't they sparkle?"

state of beaming satisfaction. Then is the time to ask a favor of him.

For a little while after Mr. Hart stepped on board this good ship his spirits were weighed down by melancholy. The tragic death of Philip had affected him powerfully. During their brief acquaintance he had grown to love the young man most deeply and sincerely, and he felt like a father who had lost a darling son. "I have already said that Mr. Hart, although he was over sixty years of age, was a young-looking man. He had lines and furrows in his face, but they did not bring a careworn or despondent expression there, as is generally the case. His gait, his voice, his manner, the brightness of his eyes, were those which naturally belong to three decades of years instead of six. What more pleasant sight is there in human nature than to see old age thus borne?" For the first few days, however, after the sailing of *The Good Harvest*, Mr. Hart looked his years.

But to stand upon the deck, holding on by spar or rope, while the noble ship rushed bravely onward through the grand sea, now riding on the white crests of great water ranges, now gliding through the wondrous valleys on the wings of the wind, was enough to make an old man young again. It made Mr. Hart young. The salt spray and the fresh exhilarating breeze drove youth into his pores, and his heart danced within him as day after day passed, and he was drawn nearer and nearer to the shores of old England. They brought back to him also his youthfulness and cheerfulness of heart. The great secret of this change for the better lay in himself. He had faith; he believed in the goodness of God and in a hereafter. He did not love Philip less because he grieved for him less. "I shall see Philip again," he thought; and his heart glowed as he looked at the sea and the heavens, and saw around him the wondrous evidences of a beneficent Creator.

Every soul on board *The Good Harvest*—with the exception of two or three passengers who had made their fortunes in the gold country, and whose natures had been soured in the process—had a smile and a good word for the cheerful and genial old man, who seemed to be always on the lookout to do his neighbors a kindness; he was an exemplification of Macaulay's saying, with reference to a voyage in a passenger ship, "It is every day in the power of an amiable person to confer little services." He was unremitted in his attentions to Margaret, whom, however, he could not win to cheerfulness. It was well for her, during this darkened period of her life, that she had by her side such a faithful friend as Mr. Hart; for as the constant dropping of water makes an impression even on a stone, so the unceasing care and constant sympathy of this good friend had a beneficial effect upon her spirits. At present the effect was shown only in a negative way; while Mr. Hart's efforts failed to brighten her outwardly during the voyage, they prevented her from sinking into the depths of despair. At first she was loath to speak of Philip, and when Mr. Hart mentioned his name, she looked at him reproachfully; but, knowing that it would be best for her, he wooed her gently to speak of her lost love. These efforts were made always at seasonable times; in the evening, when all was quiet and calm, and they two were sitting alone, looking over the bulwarks at the beautiful water; when the evening star came out; later on in the night, when the heavens were filled with stars; when the moon rose; when the clouds were more than usually lovely. The memory of Philip became, as it were, harmonized with these peaceful influences, and his name, gently uttered, brought no disquiet to her soul. She grew to associate Philip with all that was most beautiful and peaceful in nature; and although she would occasionally in the dead of night awake from her sleep in terror with the sound of furious flames in her mind, and with Philip's form struggling in their midst, these disturbing fancies became less frequent as time wore on. One night she awoke, smiling, for she had dreamed of Philip in association with more soothing influences; she and he had been walking together on a still night, with bright stars about them.

She began to be aware of the selfishness of her grief, and to reproach herself for her ingratitude to Mr. Hart. She expressed her penitence to him.

"Well," he said, kindly and seriously, "that is good in one way. It shows that you are becoming a little more cheerful."

She shook her head.

"I shall never again be cheerful; happiness is gone out of my life forever."

"Philip does not like to hear you say so, Margaret." Mr. Hart purposely used the present tense. Margaret pondered over the words. "Philip does not like!" That would imply that Philip heard her.

"He does hear you, my dear," said Mr. Hart. "If I believed that you would never see Philip again I should bid you despair; but you and Philip will meet in a better world than this, and that is why I was so cheerful, as he would ask you to be, if you could hear his voice."

In this way Mr. Hart aroused to full consciousness the religious principle within her, and it may with truth be said that, although Margaret had lived a pure and sinless life, she had never been a better woman than she was now, notwithstanding the deep sorrow which had fallen upon her.

When *The Good Harvest* had been seventy days out, the skipper said to Mr. Hart that he smelled England. "If all goes well," he said, "we shall be in Victoria Dock in seven days from this."

Mr. Hart immediately went below into his cabin to set his things in order. He mapped out his programme of proceedings. His first task—one of duty—was to see William Smith's old mother. She lived in London, and if he got ashore before midday, he would be able to put Margaret into lodgings, and see the old woman the same day. Then he would draw before her eyes the sketch of the picture which William Smith had paid him to paint, of The Margaret Reef and The William Smith quartz crushing-machine "bang-banging away," and he would delight the old woman's heart by telling her of the grand doings of her son. Mr. Hart calculated that he could accomplish this by the evening, when he would take his sketch away with him, and paint the picture from it in the course of the next three or four weeks. His second task was one of love; he would go to see his daughter. Curiously enough, she was in Devonshire, whither he should have to direct his steps in Margaret's interests. Philip's father lived in "dear old Devon," to use Philip's own words; but that and the allusions to the Silver Flagon, which had been adopted as the sign of their hotel in Silver Creek, were the only clues which Mr. Hart

possessed toward finding old Mr. Rowe. Faint as these clues were (and he had discovered that Margaret could not supply him with any more definite), it was clearly his duty to do his best with them. Margaret, of course, would accompany him to Devonshire, and become acquainted with his daughter Lucy, whose name is now for the first time mentioned. Seated in his cabin, Mr. Hart took out his pocket-book, and wrote in it the order of his proceedings. This being done, he looked over the contents of the book, and came across a blank envelope with a bulky enclosure in it. At first he did not remember how this envelope came into his possession, but he was only in doubt for a moment or two. It was the packet which Philip had given into his charge on his return from his honeymoon. Mr. Hart recalled the conversation that had taken place between them on the occasion, and the promise Philip had exacted from him that he would not give up the envelope until they met in the old country. He sighed as he thought that that meeting could never take place, and he went into the saloon where Margaret was sitting. He asked her if Philip had spoken to her about this trust; she answered, no, and that she was in complete ignorance of it.

"Now that poor Philip's wish cannot be fulfilled," said Mr. Hart, "you had better take possession of the packet."

"He held it out to her; she refused to accept it. 'It was given into your charge,' she said, 'by my poor lost darling. Every word he spoke is sacred to me.' Her tears began to flow."

"At all events," said Mr. Hart, "we had best see what is inside."

He opened the envelope, and found that it inclosed another, well sealed, on the cover of which was written:

"*The Property of Gerald, and to be opened only by him.*"

This complicated matters.

"Gerald," thought Mr. Hart; "my name!" and said aloud: "Do you know who Gerald is?"

"My poor darling," replied Margaret, "has spoken to me of a friend he had named Gerald."

"Then this must be he," Mr. Hart replaced the envelope in his pocket-book. "We may have the good fortune to find him. Gerald may have been a college friend."

So that now there was another task, with the slightest of clues, to be fulfilled.

Mr. Hart had noticed, with great inward satisfaction, that during the past two or three weeks Margaret was looking brighter; she had not, it is true, recovered her old animation of speech and manner, but comfort and consolation had come to her in some way. More than once she had seemed to be on the point of confiding something to this dear friend, who was now all in the world she had to cling to, but the words she wished to speak would not come to her tongue. On this night, however, as they stood upon the deck, talking of Philip, of home, of the future, in subdued tones, Mr. Hart learned Margaret's secret. She hoped to become a mother.

"Heaven pray that it may be so," thought Mr. Hart; "it will be a joy and a solace to her bruised heart."

Another day went by, and another. *The Good Harvest* sailed smartly on to England's shores. The sailors sang blithely at their work; the skipper paced the deck in a joyous frame of mind, thinking of his wife and children at home; and almost at the very hour named by him, the long voyage was at an end, and London smoke was curling over the masts of the famous clipper ship.

II.

"THE WORLD IS FULL OF SWEET AND BEAUTIFUL PLACES."

On a day in June, when the roses were blooming, there sauntered through one of the sweetest of all the sweet country lanes in England an elderly man, whose hair was white, and whose dress and bearing denoted that he was a gentleman. The lane was a long one, with many windings, and the few persons whom the gentleman met touched their hats and bowed to him as they passed with varying degrees of deference, according to their station; he, on his part, receiving all these greetings with uniform courtesy, and with the accustomed air of one to whom homage of this kind was familiar. Walking toward him, at a distance of three or four hundred yards, at the moment his figure first appear upon the scene, was a man of about the same age, whose inquiring looks this way and that proclaimed either that the locality was strange to him, or that he was renewing acquaintance with it after a lapse of years. His dress was composed of much commoner materials than was that of the gentleman whom he was approaching, and there were a careless freedom and an assertion of independence in his manner which only those who have traveled about the world can detect.

In the minds of these two men, one holding a high, the other a humble station in life, there was no thought of each other; but the threads of their lives, which had been so wide apart, and for so long a time as to make it appear almost an impossibility that they should ever again be connected, were approaching closer and closer with each passing moment, and would soon be joined, never more to be unlinked. They knew not of it, thought not of it; but it was most sure. What is it that shapes our lives—chance, or a wise ordination? Say that, invited by a faint smell of lilac, or by the fluttering of a butterfly's wings with a rare color in them which we would not hold again, we turn aside but for one moment from our contemplated course—can it be possible that we are such slaves of circumstance that this simple deviation (if it may be so called) may change the current of our lives from good to ill, from bad fortune to prosperity? How often does one breath of air change a comedy into a tragedy! Blindly we walk along, and presently may be struggling in the dark with grim terrors, or may be walking among flowers, surrounded by everything that can make life sweet.

In a very narrow part of the country lane, where the hedgerows were most fragrant, was a stile upon the top bar of which the stranger rested his foot, and turning, gazed with pleased and grateful eyes over the fair vista of field and wood which the hedgerows shut out from the view of those who walked on the level path. Although he was between sixty and seventy years of age, his eyes were bright, and his face was the face of one who was prone to look upon the best side of things.

"How fair and beautiful it is!" he murmured gratefully. "What is there in the world half so sweet as these dear old English lanes and fields?" He paused to

reflect upon his question; and then, with the whimsically serious air of one who was accustomed to commune with himself, exclaimed, "Nonsense, Gerald, nonsense! The world is full of sweet and beautiful places."

Gentle undulations of land, beautified by various color, were before him; shadows of light passed over the landscape like waves, and stole from it the sadness which is ever an attribute of still life. There were farm-yards in the distance, and sheep, with bells round their necks, trudging with patient gait to where the most tempting herbage lay. The sheep were at a great distance from the stranger, and by a curious trick of the fancy he listened to the tinkling of the bells, although it was impossible that the sound could reach him. Other sounds he could hear plainly; the cry of the woodpecker, and the more melodious note of the cuckoo, beautifully clear, notwithstanding its slightly plaintive ring.

"And full of sweet sounds, too," mused the stranger, pursuing the current of his thoughts; and added immediately, with the same whimsically-serious air, and as if in comical defense of a prejudice, "Certainly no birds sing like English birds."

"I beg your pardon."

The threads of their lives had met, never more to be unweaved, and the threads of other lives were presently to be joined to theirs, for weal or woe, as fate might determine. From this chance meeting rare combinations were to spring.

"I was remarking," said the stranger, turning to the gentleman who was standing by the stile, waiting to cross, "and not with justice, that no birds sing like English birds." The gentleman did not answer him, and then he comprehended that the words uttered by the gentleman had been used not in contradiction of his statement, but as a request that he would move aside.

He descended from the stile with a courteous smile, and said, "I beg your pardon, I am sure, both for blocking up the roadway and for misunderstanding you; but I was so wrapt in the beauty of the scene and in my own thoughts, that I misinterpreted the intention of your words. Notwithstanding which, I should like to have your opinion as to whether I am right or not."

The gentleman had bent his head in acknowledgment of the half apology, and when the stranger ceased speaking was standing on the other side of the stile. The gentleman gazed at the stranger and recognized at a glance that although he was commonly dressed, his manners and speech were not those of a common person. To have proceeded on his way without a word would have been churlish; therefore he said, in a somewhat indifferent tone,

"Right as to the birds?"

"Yes, as to the birds," replied the stranger, with vivacity.

"I cannot say; I have not traveled. Some of our best woodland singers are migratory. But I should say—although I am not in the least way an authority—that it would be no easy matter to find more melodious woods than our English woods."

"That is true; then I was right. Though whether I meant that English birds were or were not better singers than birds of other countries, it would puzzle me to say. But as to the English woods—they are the sweetest and fairest. There again I have lain in the Australian woods, and my soul has been thrilled by their beauty. Yes, I was right. The world is full of sweet and beautiful places."

The gentleman smiled at these contradictory utterances, but the stranger's words could not have been more at variance with one another than were his speech and his attire. His words were scholarly, and his clothes were patched.

"You look and speak like an Englishman," said the gentleman.

"I am one."

"From your words I should judge that this part of England is strange to you."

"It is more than thirty years since I was last in Devonshire."

"That is a long time—you must find it changed somewhat."

"Somewhat."

While these words were being exchanged, their observance of each other, which had been slight at first, grew closer and more searching, and into their eyes stole a pondering look so curiously alike that one seemed to be a reflection of the other. But for the influence which this close observance exercised upon him, the gentleman would not have stopped to converse with an unknown man, and with one so far beneath him, from a worldly point of view. The stranger repeated thoughtfully:

"Yes, I find it somewhat changed."

"It is in the nature of things," said the gentleman, "to change as we grow old."

"Not so. I find it changed because I have changed. Old eyes and young eyes see the same things differently. Are the clouds less bright than they were when we were young? Are the flowers less beautiful? When Jacob courted Laban's daughters o' nights (how they must have laughed in their sleeves, if they were them, at the old man's craft), were the nights less lovely than the nights are now?"

The gentleman passed his hand lightly before his eyes, as if to clear away a vapor.

"I am corrected," he said, with the air of a man whose thoughts were traveling one road, while his words traveled another; "we sometimes say things without consideration."

"Either because they sound well, or because they seem to savor of wisdom. That comes from our vanity. When men grow as old as we are, they often ape the philosopher. The lark changes into an owl. They try to shape their words so that they may sound like proverbs."

"They utter one occasionally, perhaps."

"Perhaps," said the stranger, in a tone of dubious assent; "but the odds are heavy against it. Even if they do, what then?"

"I was asking—a well-to-do man, Mr. Weston?"

"Well-to-do!" exclaimed the laborer, thirstily "They say he have no end o' money."

"Highly respected, no doubt."

"That 'a be," replied the laborer, becoming very parched indeed. "If ye'll stand atop the stile, ye'll see the chimneys of his house. 'Tis a rare fine house!"

The stranger stood upon the top bar of the stile, and gazed in the indicated direction. "I see them, and I make my obeisance to them." Saying which he doffed his hat, and bowed, with a curiously-fantastic tenderness. He quite forgot the laborer, who was standing

"It would be difficult to establish that."

"Most easy. I will prove it in a practical way. Repeat a proverb—any one that occurs to you; the more familiar the better—and I will make it with another, equally familiar, which gives it the lie."

The gentleman might have accepted the challenge, but that a laborer, approaching them from his side of the stile, seemed to remind him that he was losing dignity in conversing with one who wore patched clothes, and who was unknown to him. Bidding the stranger "Good-day," and slightly bending his head in acknowledgment of the laborer's deferential bow, he walked slowly away.

III.

"CUSTOS ROTULORUM."

As the laborer crossed the stile, the stranger accosted him.

"Hodge?"

"Who be Hodge?" quoth the laborer uncivilly, but disposed for conversation and argument.

"You—in a collective sense."

"Then ye've gotten the sow by the wrong ear."

"Supposing I have got a sow at all," said the stranger, complacently, "will you present to me the right ear?"

Not understanding the nature of the request, the man continued playing on the same string: "Hodge bain't my name!" and grinned with the triumph of a philosopher.

"What may be your name, then, my most veracious hair-splitter?"

"I be no splitter. Who be ye a-callin' names? As for my name, that I'll keep to myself." Saying which, the laborer fastened a loose button with an air of determination.

With a chuckle, the stranger replied, "Like yourself, oh, tiller of the soil—for such you are, I opine, and as such, the noblest work of God—like yourself, I am but a poor player, who struts and frets his hour upon the stage."

"Eh! a player! I was thinking ye didn't look like a worker. I know 'en when I see 'en!" and the laborer grinned again at his own wit.

"But 'tis not of ourselves I wish to speak," said the stranger, in a tone which he purposely made grandiloquent; "'tis of another—of the gentleman to whom you doffed your cap, and who has just left us."

"What do you want of 'en?" demanded the laborer, in a sharp tone, cocking his ears like a terrier.

"His name."

"Eh! More names! D'ye come down here to rob us of 'en? But there be no harm a-tellin' of ye. It may be a warnin' to ye. 'A's name be Mr. Weston."

"That 's the stranger's light manner was gone. 'Weston!' he cried, seizing the man's arm.

The laborer shook himself free, and, in a severe tone, corrected the stranger:

"Mister Weston, I told ye."

"I ask you and Mr. Weston's pardon. A well-to-do man 'tis Mr. Weston."

The laborer scanned the stranger's clothes; the mental result was not favorable.

"That be his business, 'a b'lieve," he said, suspiciously.

Apparently in an absent mood, the stranger drew from his pocket a handful of things, among which were a short pipe, a tobacco-pouch, and some money. Somewhat ostentatiously he picked out a few silver and copper pieces, and held them loosely in his left hand. The laborer, who was about to slouch away, altered his mind, and lingered penitentially.

"Good 'lder about here, my man?" asked the stranger.

"That there be," replied the laborer, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth. "The best in the county."

"I passed an old-fashioned hostelry—more like a gentleman's house than a hotel—about half a mile from this spot—" The stranger paused.

"Up along there," said the laborer, pointing with his finger.

"Yes; in that direction."

"With a bit o' garden round 'en," volunteered the laborer.

"Ay, with a garden round it."

"And a swing gate before 'en—"

"'Tis so. And a swing gate opening into the garden. Apple-trees before the house."

"Standing back from the road the house be," said the laborer, moving his lips as one might do preparatory to the imbibing of a deep draught of the best cider in the county.

"It 's warmish," said the stranger, with a look of sly enjoyment. "Yes, standing back from the road the house is."

"That be The Silver Flagon."

The stranger leaped off the stile with a sudden cry.

"A day of wonders!" he exclaimed. "Providence must have lead me in this direction." A sad and tender reminiscence brought the tears to his eyes. "The Silver Flagon! The dear old Silver Flagon! And the proprietor's name is Rowe, an old man and a gentleman!"

"That 'a be—as wold a man as ye, 'a should say. A rare fine place 'tis."

"It looks it." The stranger's eyes glittered with joy.

"Too fine for the likes of—" ("we," he was about to say, but the sight of the stranger's money caused a correction)—"me. 'A can get rare fine cider in another place."

Doubtless, the stranger could scarcely restrain his excitement. "But to come back to what we were speaking of just now" (rattling the money in his hand)—"this Mr. Weston—By the way, though, let us give him his full name—By Richard Weston, of course."

"Ay, that be his name."

The laborer would have used the word "full," but that it stood in his mind for foolish.

"I was asking—a well-to-do man, Mr. Weston?"

"Well-to-do!" exclaimed the laborer, thirstily "They say he have no end o' money."

"Highly respected, no doubt."

"That 'a be," replied the laborer, becoming very parched indeed. "If ye'll stand atop the stile, ye'll see the chimneys of his house. 'Tis a rare fine house!"

The stranger stood upon the top bar of the stile, and gazed in the indicated direction. "I see them, and I make my obeisance to them." Saying which he doffed his hat, and bowed, with a curiously-fantastic tenderness. He quite forgot the laborer, who was standing

by his side, greedily and humbly expectant, but a cough and a kick at the stile recalled him to himself. He turned, and with a negligent nod and a half smile at the laborer, dropped the money carelessly into his pocket, and proceeded to charge his pipe.

A minute or two passed in silence; then the laborer coughed again, and scraped his foot, and shifted his body restlessly; but the stranger puffed at his pipe calmly, and did not appear to notice him, although really he was enjoying the man's discomfort. The laborer went through a certain mental process. First, he was mystified, and his mind was perfectly clouded; then a glimmer of light broke into the clouds, and a dim suspicion stole upon him that he had been beaten into civility by a trick. With a sense of helplessness, and of submission to the superior cunning by which he had been conquered, he was about to move away, when the passing of his tongue over his lips made him ireful and vindictive. A thought struck him, and he proceeded to give it expression.

"'A say!" he cried, in his uncivil tone.

The stranger removed his pipe from his lips, and raised his eyes toward the man. "Ah, you have an idea, evidently. Stand, then, and deliver!" The man started back, having some notion of the meaning of the words; he clapped his hand on his trousers-pocket to protect three halfpence and—his idea. "Don't be alarmed," said the stranger; "nothing of that sort was in my mind. Proceed, my friend."

"No friend o' yours, that 'a know of," retorted the laborer. "You'd best take care!"

"I will endeavor to do so."

The laborer searched his mind for a colloquial stone with which to smite his foe. He found one. "Ye don't look too respectable."

"You deserve a reward for your perspicacity," said the stranger, much amused—and the laborer, at the unfamiliar word, started again—"if not for your civility. You have a keener scent than our friend—I beg your pardon once more—than Mr. Weston."

"Well, take care, then. He be a justice."

"A little one or a big one, my man? A frog or an ox? For there be justices and justices."

"A big 'un. Take care!" This iteration appeared to assuage his thirst.

"Custos rotulorum, eh?"

"'A thought you was no good—cussin' and swearin'."

"'A've a good mind—"

"I hope so, I am sure, I am sure. May it long remain uncontaminated!"

"'A've a good mind to go and tell 'en."

"You've a good mind to go and tell him you've a good mind?" queried the stranger, in a quiet bantering tone.

"To tell 'en ye're up to no good; seeking to know all about it—whether he be rich, and where he lives. Danged if I don't b'lieve ye're one o' them London chaps come down along here wi' designs!"

"A peripatetic architect," said the stranger, laughing heartily. "Thank you for the compliment, my rustic sage. I am nothing so dignified as that, believe me. But allow me to correct you. You yourself volunteered the information as to the whereabouts of Mr. Weston's house; the information may be useful to me."

"May 'en! Danged if I don't go and tell 'en!"

The stranger stood aside to allow the laborer to cross the stile.

"Come after me, if ye dare!" cried the laborer.

"I dare do all that may become a man," replied the stranger; and also crossing the stile, he leisurely followed the laborer, who took care to keep at a fair distance.

They had not to walk far: round another bend in the lane, where it broadened unexpectedly, and where great tufts of feather-grass were swinging their fairy bells over a brook, they came upon Mr. Weston resting himself. He turned toward them at their approach.

The laborer took off his cap and bowed to the ground, and the stranger, who was now on his feet, stepped forward, and then found himself in a difficulty. He had not the wit to lead up to the attack gently, and with the consciousness upon him of the stranger's superior flow of speech, he felt himself at a disadvantage. If the stranger would speak first, he could take up his words; but the stranger stood provokingly calm and silent.

"Well?" said Mr. Weston.

The sense of injury under which the man labored gave him courage.

"This chap here," he blurted out, with a back scrape of his right foot, "be up to no good, you know."

Mr. Weston looked at the stranger and waited for further explanation.

"'A be a London chap come down along here wi' designs. 'A don't deny 'em. 'A be cravin' all sorts of questions about your honor. 'A wanted to know whether your honor was rich, where your honor's house be, and how much money your honor keeps in it. I conceived it my duty to come along and tell your honor."

"Oh, most mendacious Hodge!" exclaimed the stranger, shaking his head in sad and smiling reproof.

"That be the way 'a's been talkin' all the time; and swearin' and cussin' as well, and callin' your honor a frog. When 'a'd drawn o' me that your honor was a justice, 'a cussed and rotted your honor."

"Custos rotulorum," said the stranger.

"They be the words—cussin' and rotti'n', your honor."

IV.

not reason. So that it really is something of a shock to come upon each other after so long an interval, and find so great a change."

They fell into silence. Tender memories were stirred to life, and visions of scenes in which they had played prominent parts rose before them. Old as they were, romance was not dead in their hearts. But suddenly, as they traced the current of their youthful lives, they gazed at each other with sad meaning. Each knew instinctively that the thoughts of the other had halted at a certain momentous epoch in their careers.

V

A STRANGE STORY.

"GERALD," said Mr. Weston, "you went away very suddenly and strangely; I often wondered as to the cause."

"And never suspected?"

"I think not the right cause. I imagined a hundred things in my endeavors to fathom the mystery, but without success. It is a mystery still to me."

"You imagined such things as—?" He paused for Mr. Weston to take up his words.

"As whether you were in any money difficulties, for one."

Gerald Hunter—for that was his full name—shook his head. "No; when I left I owed no man a shilling, and I had money in my purse."

"I cannot recall now the various constructions I put upon your disappearance. It must have been a powerful reason that caused you to desert your friend without a word of explanation."

"It was a powerful reason. Would you like to hear it, Richard?"

"Yes, indeed."

"We are old men now," said Gerald Hunter, in a musing tone, in which there was a touch of solemnity, "and I can speak of it, and you can hear it, without pain. But tell me first about Clara." His voice faltered as he uttered the name.

"She is dead," murmured Mr. Weston, softly, "many, many years ago."

A cuckoo flew past them, singing as it flew, and seemed to echo plaintively, "Years ago!"

"You loved her, Richard?"

"With my whole soul, Gerald."

"I knew it; and I read the announcement of your marriage in the papers. You were happy in your marriage?"

"Very, very happy. Our only grief during the first few years was that we had no children. But that blessing, which brought with it also the keenest sorrow of my life, was bestowed upon us after seven years. Clara placed a child in my arms, and died a few hours afterward."

"It must have been a bitter blow, dear friend."

"I had a consolation, Gerald; her last words to me, as she placed her arms about my neck, were that she had lived with me in perfect happiness, and that we should meet each other again."

"Her child lives?"

"You shall see him, Gerald. I named him after you. It was Clara's wish, before our child was born, that if we were blessed with a boy, he should be called Gerald. He is a handsome young fellow—a man now—good, noble, and high-minded." He spoke with the pride of a fond father.

"I am sure he would be."

"My most earnest hope is that he may make a good alliance. He can look high, for he will be rich. But to your confession, Gerald; we have wandered away from it."

"You will not say so when you have heard it." He placed his hand upon the hand of his friend. "Have you still no suspicion of it?"

"No, Gerald, I hold no clue."

"I kept my secret well, then. Dear friend, I loved Clara."

Mr. Weston turned to Gerald Hunter with a startled look.

"And I knew," continued Gerald, "that you loved her, and that she looked upon me only as a friend of the man to whom she had given her heart. Fearful lest my secret should, in an unguarded moment, become known to you and her, and knowing that disclosure would bring an unnecessary grief into your lives, I adopted the only safe course which was open to me. I did not envy your happiness, Richard, but I felt that I could bear my sorrow more bravely away from you—therefore I deserted you."

"Dear Gerald," said Mr. Weston, tenderly, "it was like you. How blind I must have been! But I can see it now. Noble heart! Dear noble friend! I think I never fully valued you till now."

"You would have done the same by me, Richard," said Gerald Hunter.

"I do not know—I do not know; I doubt if I should have had the courage to fly. If I had been in your place—you with your higher gifts were the first in everything, Gerald; I was content always to walk behind you—I am afraid that I should have stopped and tried my fortune."

"No, no," said Gerald, in gentle remonstrance; "I know you better than you know yourself. You would have acted as I did. Your friendship was as honest as mine. There could be no rivalry in love between us."

"I honor you more than ever, Gerald."

"It was a sacrifice, Richard, you can understand that; but I said to myself, 'This sunny spot in life which I laid out for myself, and in which I hoped to bask and lie in happiness—I had that hope, Richard, before I discovered that Clara loved you—is not to be mine: it is my friend's; but I will be revenged upon him; and who knows, dear friend, but that I may yet be?' His tone was very sweet as he uttered these words, the deep significance of which was not comprehended by either of them. The time was to come when they were well remembered, and when they bore strange fruit. "I bless her memory," continued Gerald.

"Her goodness and purity made many things sweet to me. That I loved her and left her—conscious that it was imperative upon me to do so for the sake both of love and friendship—did not make me a despairing man. In course of time my grief was softened; I formed other ties, one of which remains to me now, thank God; and through all my wanderings I never lost faith in woman or woman's purity. If, in a cynical mood, it ever came upon me to doubt, I thought of her, and the doubt was dissolved. It may be, Richard, that in the wise ordination of things, her spirit can see us now!" In the silence that followed, the thoughts of both these men dwelt in tenderness on the memory of the gentle girl who had

parted them. Gerald was the first to break the silence.

"Where is she buried, Richard?"

"I will take you to her grave."

They walked hand-in-hand, as boys might have done, beguiling the way with conversation. "Clara and I often spoke of you," said Mr. Weston, "and always with affection, you may be sure. And not long after you disappeared, a singular thing happened! Clara received notice from a lawyer that a legacy had been left to her—it was not a very large one, some four hundred pounds."

"There is nothing singular in that," said Gerald, calmly.

"No, but in the manner of it! We never knew the name of the person who left the money. It was expressly stipulated that the name of the legator should not be revealed. I went to the lawyer on Clara's behalf, being curious to ascertain the name of her generous friend—and mine, I may say—but the lawyer was steadfast. His instructions were definite, he said, and he could not go beyond them. The only information he was empowered to give—if any inquiry was made—was that the legacy was a legacy of love. It puzzled us a great deal."

A peculiar smile passed over the face of Gerald Hunter, which his friend did not perceive. "You must have been fortunate in other ways, Richard, to have prospered as you have prospered. For you are a prosperous man."

"Thank God, yes. I am a rich man, Gerald."

"Rich! Ah!" exclaimed Gerald, wistfully and almost hungrily.

"I owe much of my good fortune to luck, and not to my deservings. A legacy was also left to me, in a very wonderful way! But in this case I knew the name of the person, who died in a foreign country, and who made me his executor. It is a strange story." He looked over his shoulder with an air of fear. Gerald noticed the motion with surprise.

"You used not to be nervous," observed Gerald.

"Why do you say that?" asked Mr. Weston.

"You looked over your shoulder just now so strangely and nervously. Almost as though you expected to see a ghost."

Mr. Weston shuddered. "I can tell you the story as we walk on. It will take but a short time, although it commences twenty years ago. A relative whom I had seen but once in my childhood died in a distant land, and made me his executor. He was a very wealthy man, and his will was a singular one. I was the only relative to whom he left a legacy, and indeed I believe the only relative who was living. He divided his money between me and twelve other persons. All these others were strangers to him, and he became acquainted with their names in the following manner: It seems that he loved his mother with a very deep affection; when she died, he discovered that she had left a diary, and in its pages he learned that she had suffered much in her early days, before her son was born. She had led a wandering life in her youth, every particular of which was set down in her diary, and in it she mentioned the names of persons who had been kind to her in her wanderings; in one page of her diary occurred the words: 'It would render me very happy to be able to repay them for their great goodness to me.' What did the son do when he grew rich but place himself in communication with a London lawyer, who was instructed to trace all these persons, and to ascertain the fullest particulars of themselves and their circumstances. Some had died and left no issue; some had died and had left children; he kept himself acquainted with all their careers, and shortly before his death he made a will, devising the whole of his wealth to these persons, and naming me as his executor."

"You must remember, Gerald, that he had never seen one of these persons, and that he was totally unacquainted with their characters; when, by and by, you hear the full particulars, you will know why I mention this; I will only say here that two young persons, a young lady and a young gentleman, were left in the guardianship of a man whom I cannot think of without a shudder. They fell in love with each other; but their guardian, to whom their share of the money left would revert in case of their death, set himself resolutely against their union; he held absolute control over them, and the result of his control was that they met with a tragic end; they drowned themselves, and were found dead, clasped in each other's arms. But I am wandering from the thread of the story. This will come home to me, and all the persons interested in it were summoned together. The place of meeting was a principal room in The Silver Flagon; and at the appointed time we met. It was a strange gathering; we were all strangers to one another; but you can understand that the circumstances of our being brought together made us friends at once. When the will was read, every person present found that he had become rich in a strange and wonderful manner. There were in all thirteen of us. Exhilarated by the pleasantness of the occasion, and excited by its novelty, we ordered dinner at The Silver Flagon, and sat down to table—thirteen in number. Upon this number being ascertained, the usual theme was started: one of the thirteen was sure to die before twelve months had passed. Said one, a merry fellow, Reuben Thorne by name, 'Let us prove the falseness of this old-time absurdity. Here we are, made rich and comfortable for all our lives; here we are, brought together by an extraordinary circumstance, and forced into friendship by the gratitude of a man whose money we are going to spend in the enjoyment of the good things of this life. One of the best things in life is a good dinner; another of the best things in life is good company. Let us enter into a compact to dine here all together in this very room, in the jolly Silver Flagon, every year, on the anniversary of this happy day.'

"Now in the will there was a sentence to the effect that the legator would be glad if those to whom he bequeathed his money would become friends; and the proposition of Reuben Thorne's seemed to open a way to this consummation. Elated and excited, we there and then entered into a solemn compact, drawn up and signed by every one of us, to meet regularly every year, and dine together as we were doing on that day. And, furthermore, we solemnly pledged ourselves to have no more than thirteen at the table, and that at one and another died, his chair and place at the table should be kept for him, and that the vacant chair should receive all the attention which would be given to it if a living person occupied the seat. This compact, solemnly made, was solemnly kept. Year after year we met; one died, another died; the young lovers I have mentioned were found dead in the river; chair after chair

became vacant; and still every year the dinner for thirteen was served in the old room, The Silver Flagon. Gerald, I have outlived them all; for two years I have dined alone. Of all those thirteen I am the only one left."

"A strange story indeed," remarked Gerald Hunter; and respecting his companion's evident desire not to speak further on the subject, he preserved silence—a silence broken presently by Mr. Weston saying:

"A little while ago, Gerald, you made a remark which surprised me. You spoke of your eager hunt after gold. If I have grown somewhat nervous, you also are changed in this respect, supposing you meant what you said."

"I did mean it. All my body and soul, all my pulses were wrapped in the hunt. Ah, you, little know what the gold fever is!"

"But that you should have it, Gerald! You of all men in the world—you who once despised money, and set it at naught!"

"As I despise it and set it at naught now, in comparison with other and better things. Truly, I believe that there was a fair excuse for my giving way to the fever. I wanted money, Richard—not for myself, for another. Yes, no purely selfish motive influenced me. But you shall hear all by and by—that is if—"

"Speak, Gerald."

"If you are not changed—if you are the same Weston as of old. If you are not, but nod your head at me, and I will shake you by the hand once more, and go my way."

"Gerald, Gerald!" expostulated Mr. Weston.

"Nay, I mean what I say. It would be human nature. I should be sorry that I had met you again, but I should fling the memory of this meeting from me with all the force of my will, and would strive my hardest to reinstate you, unsullied, in my heart." He spoke with earnest vehemence, and if any impression was in Mr. Weston's mind as to the manifest difference in their stations in life—judging from outward appearances—it vanished for the time at Gerald's words.

"Recall for me," he said, "some words I spoke to you once when we were opening our hearts to one another."

"Special words?"

"Special words, with reference to our friendship," replied Mr. Weston, in a tone of anxiety lest his friend should fail to remember them.

"So many!" pondered Gerald; "but I can speak the words that are in my mind. I think, 'Once my friend, always my friend; remember that, Gerald.'"

"Those are the words, and I say to you now, 'Once my friend, always my friend; remember that, Gerald.'"

They clasped hands again. "Well said, and well remembered. Yet you are a magistrate, *custos rotulorum*!"—Gerald laughed at the remembrance of the laborer—"and I—well, I am something very like a vagabond. Look at my patched clothes—see my wealth." He pulled out of his pockets all the money he had in the world, amounting to between thirty and forty pounds, and counted it over, half merrily and half wistfully. "If you knew how precious these bits of gold are to me, Richard, you would wonder!"

"I wonder as it is, Gerald."

"Well you may. Do you think I care for this dross for my own sake? Thank God, no! But lately—only within these last few weeks—I have grown to know the pitiless power of money, and to thirst for it!"

"I will help you, Gerald," said Mr. Weston, strongly moved by his friend's passion; "I will help you."

"It is for my daughter," murmured Gerald, "not for myself, for my daughter, dearer to me than my blood, than my life! Let me but see her happy, and sheltered from storms, and I can say good-bye to the world with a smile on my lips."

They were standing now by the side of the grave, with fresh flowers about it. A plain tombstone was raised above it, with the simple inscription:

TO THE MEMORY OF
CLARA.

Love sweetens all.
Love levels all.

"A good creed," said Gerald, gazing with moistened eyes upon the inscription: "truly, love sweetens life, and love, like death, makes all men equal."

And over the grave of the woman whom they both had loved the friends again joined hands.

VI.

MR. LEWIS NATHAN INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

If you do not know that Gerald Hunter and Mr. Hart are one and the same person, I have been very unskillful in my narration. As there will presently come another Gerald into the scene, our dear old friend must henceforward bear only his surname.

A few words are necessary to fill up the gap in our story. Directly Mr. Hunter and Margaret arrived home, he sought out William Smith's mother, and executed his friend's commission. This done, to the extravagant delight of the old woman (you may be sure that Mr. Hunter was not sparing in his praises of William Smith), Mr. Hunter and Margaret set off for Devonshire. He had confided his darling Lucy to the care of friends, so called, who had promised to look after her as a daughter. When her father was announced, the gentle girl ran into his arms, sobbing, and begged him never again to leave her. He then discovered that she had for the last two or three years led an unhappy life in the house, and that she was nothing less than a dependant there. He chid her gently for allowing him to remain in ignorance of the true state of affairs, and he released her at once from her bondage.

"We will never be parted again, my darling," he said, with fond caresses; "your father will protect you now."

She clung to him affectionately. They were proud of each other, this old man and his daughter. She dried her tears, and looked into his face with a smile on her lips.

"That's right, my darling," he said; "be brave, be brave!"

She shook her head seriously. "Ah, but I'm not brave," she replied; "not a bit—not a little tiny bit. That is why I am so glad you have come home to take care of me."

He confided her to the charge of Margaret, telling her that Lucy was his pride, his heart, the flower of his life. Before they were in each other's company an hour, these two girls—for Margaret, although a woman

in sorrow, was but a girl in years—were like sisters. Mr. Hunter's face was radiant as he saw them sitting together and observed their affectionate demeanor. Their natures, however, were different. Margaret, as you have seen in her happier days, was sparkling, vivacious, restless; Lucy was timid, yielding, more passive. The passions that agitated Margaret's breast were at once seen on the surface, in all their strength; those by which Lucy was moved were unrevealed—except to the eyes of love, in her quieter aspect, whether of joy or sorrow. These two girls fell immediately into their natural positions. Margaret assumed the office of protector, and Lucy, to whom dependence was a pleasure, accepted with much gratefulness the shield which her new friend threw before her. Each, in her turn, thanked Mr. Hunter for giving her such a friend.

They had lodgings in the heart of Plymouth. Margaret and Mr. Hunter, setting out in quest of them, saw in a shop-window the announcement that rooms were to be let in that house. The shop was a clothes-shop of not the best kind, and at the door stood a man of Jewish aspect, who seemed attracted by Margaret's face.

"Did you notice how that man stared at you, Margaret?" asked Mr. Hunter.

"No," was the reply, in an indifferent tone. She turned, and saw the man still staring at her. He was loosely and somewhat slovenly dressed, but his eye was so wonderfully sparkling, and his handsome face (although he was fifty years of age) wore such a cheerful and almost philanthropic expression, that the chances were if your eyes rested once upon him you would turn again to look.

The man came forward.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a slightly guttural tone, "but are you strangers in Plymouth?"

He did not look at Mr. Hunter.

"We are strangers," replied Mr. Hunter.

"I thought so—I thought so. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you," said Mr. Hunter; "we don't want any clothes."

"Ah, that's a pity: I could have served you cheap. But I didn't mean in that way, though I'm always ready for business—always ready. I know a customer when I see one. I'm an old resident here, and there is something you might want to know."

"We are looking for lodgings."

The shopkeeper replied eagerly, "I've the very thing you want, the very thing. Two rooms or four—made for you, made for you."

"You sell all your things ready-made," observed Mr. Hunter, with a humorous look.

Yes, yes," said the shopkeeper, with a ready smile, rubbing his hands slowly over one another, as though he were washing them with invisible soap; "all ready-made, all ready-made."

What most attracted you toward this man were his eyes. They fairly sparkled with humor and geniality. But for their remarkable brightness Mr. Hunter would have passed on, had he been allowed to do so; but for the matter of that, the shopkeeper might have stood in his way, being as all his race, singularly tenacious in the negotiation of a bargain. And here there was a bargain in question; these strangers wanted lodgings, he had lodgings to let. To hesitate with such a man as he lost. Mr. Hunter hesitated.

"Come and see them," said the shopkeeper; and did not wait for acquiescence in words, but led the way. They followed him, like sheep. There was magnetism in the man. He would make you buy a thing if you did not want it. That you did not want it did not matter to him; he had it to sell. To sell it was his business; and in his business he, as a representative man, beat the world.

Mr. Hart and Margaret walked through the shop, the shelves of which groaned beneath the weight of ready-made clothes, up a flight of stairs to the first floor. There were four comfortable rooms on the floor, comfortably furnished. The shopkeeper revealed in his description of the rooms; to have heard him you would have believed the house was a palace. "Look at the view," said; "look at the furniture; look at this couch—sit on it, it won't hurt you; real horsehair. Now just oblige me, and sit in this arm-chair—only to oblige me. What do you think of it? Is it easy, is it comfortable? Look at the pictures, look at the piano—run your fingers over it; look at the carpet. Here! sound the walls" (as though there was music in them); "look at the loftiness" (as though there was magic in the ceiling); "look at the ornaments; look at the fireplace." And all the while he was dilating upon the excellences of the apartments he was washing his hands with visible soap, and his face was beaming with geniality. Such capital hands as he at a bargain never betray anxiety.

"They are really very comfortable," said Mr. Hunter, apart, to Margaret; "what do you say to them?"

"If you are satisfied, I am," she replied, listlessly. She could not be roused to take interest in anything.

"I am afraid he is a Jew," said Mr. Hunter, in a confidential whisper.

The shopkeeper heard the remark, and he smiled—a superior smile. "Don't be afraid," he said, good-humoredly, showing a fine set of white teeth. "I shan't bite you."

Mr. Hunter was remorseful; he was afraid he had hurt the man's feeling.

"I beg your pardon," he said, flushing up.

"For what?" asked the shopkeeper. "For saying you were afraid I was a Jew? My dear sir, I am a Jew, and I'm proud of it, proud of it." And then he made this singular statement: "If I hadn't been a Jew I shouldn't have spoken to this young lady."

Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, in a tone which invited an explanation.

"You wouldn't take me for a Jew from my appearance," continued the shopkeeper, thus giving utterance to a strange hallucination indulged in by many of the race, for the speaker's Jewish cast of features was unmistakable; "but perhaps my name over the shop-door was enough for you."

"No," said Mr. Hunter; "I did not observe your name."

"The letters are big enough, anyway; every man and woman in Plymouth knows Lewis Nathan."

Margaret looked up with a sudden exclamation of surprise, and advanced a step toward Mr. Nathan.

"What name did you say?" she asked, with a strange fluttering at her breast.

"Lewis Nathan, my dear," he replied, in an earnest, fatherly tone; and then, more earnestly still, "Have you heard it before, my dear?"

She did not reply to him, but drew Mr. Hunter aside, and whispered a few words to him in an agitated manner.

"We will take the rooms," said Mr. Hunter to Mr. Nathan, "if the terms are suitable; we are bound to consider them, for we are not rich. We have only been in England a few days, and we do not know how long we may stop; so we cannot take them for any definite time."

"The terms will suit you; I'll make them suit you," said Mr. Nathan, with a strange obliviousness of self-interest. "You can take possession at once—you and your daughter."

"This lady is not my daughter; I have a daughter who will live with us; I will bring her here to-day."

"And is that all—only three?"

"Only three of us. You seem disappointed that there are no more."

"I thought—I thought," said Mr. Nathan, hesitating, "that this young lady had a mother."

"She is dead, poor soul!" murmured Margaret, with tears.

Mr. Nathan turned aside, trembling somewhat, and when he addressed them again his voice was softer and his eyes were dim.

"Don't think me impertinent, my dear," he said, drawing closer to Margaret, "but was you mother—rest her soul!—ever in Plymouth?"

"She lived here for a long time."

"I have lived here all my life. I thought I recognized your face, though you are taller, but not prettier, my dear, not prettier. Did she—forgive me if I'm wrong—did she have anything to do with the stage?"

"She was an actress, sir, and I have often heard her mention your name."

"Kindly, my dear?"

"Always kindly, always."

Mr. Nathan sat down, and hid his face in his hands. Margaret approached him and placed her hand on his shoulder; he looked up with tears in his eyes.

"And you're her daughter," he said, taking her hand and kissing it. "She was a good creature, rest her soul. What is your name?"

"You must call me Margaret."

"So will, my dear, so will. Why, it's like old times come again, my dear. What a piece of luck it is that you passed my shop! I'm as pleased as if I'd done a fine day's business."

It was in this way that Margaret came to the house of her mother's Jewish lover; and there they lived together, she and Lucy, and Lucy's father, for many weeks before the day on which Mr. Hunter discovered where the sign of The Silver Flagon was hung, and in which he met with the old friends of his youth. Those few weeks were full of anxieties. Margaret was still very despondent; his daughter Lucy was growing thin and pale, and his own funds were running short. The prospect was not a cheerful one.

Mr. Lewis Nathan was so good a friend, and had, from the force of his own genuineness and honesty of character, so found his way to their hearts, that Mr. Hunter confided in him his money troubles. Mr. Nathan offered to lend him money—without interest, he remarked.

"No," said Mr. Hunter, "I am able to earn it—or should be."

"In what way?" asked Mr. Nathan.

"I am an actor," replied Mr. Hunter; and thereupon, to Mr. Nathan's great delight, related to him the history of Hart's Star Dramatic Company.

"I know the proprietor of the theatre here," then said Mr. Nathan; "I lend him costumes often. Margaret's mother played on his stage. I'll get an engagement for you."

He was as good as his word, and once more Mr. Hunter was on the boards, playing old men this time; while Mr. Nathan sat in front, and led the applause. He played under an assumed name, and kept it as long as he could from Lucy and Margaret. One night he found them both waiting for him outside the theatre. Mr. Nathan was with him.

"I've a good mind never to forgive you," said Margaret to Mr. Nathan.

Mr. Nathan would have meekly borne the blame, but that Mr. Hunter told Margaret the real state of affairs.

"My purse was almost empty, Margaret, and Mr. Nathan wanted to fill it. But I couldn't accept his money while I was able to work. And really the engagement was not a bad one, and I am already a great favorite with the audience and the company."

"I should think you were," she cried; "who could help?"

"Nay, my dear child—"

She interrupted him impetuously, "I mean it! I mean it! You are always doing noble things, always! Do you think I shall ever forget how you risked your own life to save that of my darling Philip's? In vain, alas! in vain. And before that, too! Did you not save him from being stung to death? But if you are strong enough to work, how much stronger am I? I will go on the stage again, and earn money for us. I will! I will!"

He would scarcely listen to the proposition; but she was so determined that he could only pacify her by promising her that if they could not find Philip's father before the end of three months, she should be allowed to have her way. When the contest was over, she went to Mr. Nathan, and took his face between her pretty hands and kissed him.

"I don't wonder my poor dear mother was fond of you," she said. "And now tell me why you have never married."

"I never saw any one but your mother that I cared for, my dear," replied Mr.

close to me; I shall soon be well. And you loved him more than all the others! Bless you for saying it! But you could help loving that noble heart? I will tell you all by and by; these words between us are in sacred confidence until I unseal your lips."

They were both too affected to speak for several minutes, and then Margaret placed in Gerald's hands the letter which Philip had given into Mr. Hunter's charge. He opened it in her presence. Hungering to see her Philip's writing, she looked over his shoulder. There was no writing inside; Gerald drew out a packet of bank-notes, which he held in his hand with a bewildered air. They looked at each other for an explanation.

"Nay, it is you that must unriddle it," said Margaret. He counted the notes; they amounted to a large sum, four hundred pounds. Margaret saw, by a sudden flash in Gerald's eyes, that he could explain the mystery. After much persuasion, he told her briefly that when he and Philip were at college together he had signed bills for Philip for four hundred pounds, which he had to pay.

"My Philip repays you now," said Margaret, in a grateful tone. "And yet when I spoke of him you used no word of reproach toward him; others to whom he might have owed the money would not have been so forgiving."

"He was my friend," said Gerald, "and I loved him. Poor dear Philip!" She took his hand and kissed it; then she thought of Lucy.

"And now I want to speak to you about Lucy," she said. "If your father knew that it was the daughter of his oldest friend you loved, would he give his consent to your engagement?"

The words in which he answered her were a sufficient confirmation of her fears. "I can marry without my father's consent."

The voice of Mr. Weston himself, who had approached them unseen, suddenly broke up their conference. "Don't lose your heart to him," said the old gentleman to Margaret; "he hasn't one to give you in return. See how the rascal blushes!"

"I was making love to him," said Margaret, archly; "but as you tell me it is of no use, I had better employ my time more profitably."

And she took the old gentleman's arm, and straightway commenced to flirt with him in the most outrageous manner.

XI.

A PEEP INTO BLUEBEARD'S ROOM.

THANKS to Margaret's tact, everything went on smoothly for a little while. No person but herself knew how hard she worked during this time. She was forever on the alert, and she managed so skillfully that Mr. Weston did not even suspect that Gerald and Lucy were lovers. These young persons would have betrayed themselves a dozen times a day to Gerald's father had it not been for Margaret's vigilance: she took the old gentleman in hand, as she termed it, and entertained him so admirably that he found real pleasure in her society. She afterward declared that she had never played so difficult a part, and had never played any part so well. But Margaret, as we know, had a great idea of her own capacities.

With womanly tact and cunning, she sounded the old gentleman to the very bottom of his nature, and she was compelled to admit to herself that there was not the slightest probability of his ever voluntarily giving his consent to Gerald's union with a girl who had neither wealth nor position. He had set his mind upon a certain worldly position for his son, and he was not to be diverted from it by sentimental feeling. Gerald was to marry money, was to enter Parliament, and to make a name in society. The old gentleman respected nothing but position; he felt a glow of pride when people touched their hats to him in the streets, and without a suspicion that this mark of outward respect was paid to his wealth and not to himself, he was convinced that it was worth living for and worth working for. But notwithstanding that he was emphatically a purse-proud man, and that when he sat upon the bench at a magistrate's bosom swelled with false pride, he had one estimable quality which better men than he often do not possess. He was a man of his word, and had never been known to depart from it. What he pledged himself to he performed. His promise was better than another man's bond. Now this would cut both ways, as Margaret knew, and it was with dismay she thought that if the old gentleman once refused in plain words to sanction an engagement between Gerald and Lucy, it would take a greater power than she imagined she could ever possess to induce him to revoke his decision. If, on the other hand, she could manage, insidiously or by straight forward dealing, to induce him to sanction such an engagement, she believed she could compel him to stand by his word. But she saw no way to arrive at so desirable a consummation.

Every day she confessed to herself that her task was becoming more difficult. The fortnight during which she had exacted a promise from Lucy's father to keep his lips sealed was fast drawing to a close, and no one but herself knew that a storm was approaching which would bring a deathless grief to those she loved. She knew that she could obtain no assistance, even in the shape of advice, from any of the friends around her. Mr. Hunter was too trustful of his friend; he would listen to nothing against him. Lucy was too simple; Gerald was too rash and sanguine. These reflections were perplexing her as she stood before the glass one morning, and when she came to the end of them, she frowned and stamped her foot. "The fact is, my dear," she said, nodding her head violently to herself in the glass, "all these people are too guileless and innocent to be of the slightest use to you. You are the only wicked one among them." And then she thought she would go and consult her mother's old lover, Mr. Lewis Nathan, the clothes-seller. But she was frightened to leave the house, with Mr. Weston in it, and no watch-dog over him. Fortune befriended her, however, for over the breakfast-table Mr. Weston mentioned that business would take him away from them until the evening. Margaret's eyes sparkled.

"We shall be quite dull without you," she said. She had so ingratiated herself into the old gentleman's good graces that he really believed her, and he gravely answered that he would be sure to be back by a certain hour. Little did he suspect that he was nursing a serpent in his bosom. Margaret saw him safely off, and then, telling Lucy that she had business in town, put on her bonnet and shawl.

"What business, Maggy?" asked Lucy. "I am going shopping," replied Margaret, with a face of most unblushing innocence.

"Oh, I'll come with you," cried Lucy, eagerly. (I take the opportunity of parenthetically stating my belief that women like "shopping" even better than love-making.)

"I don't want you, my pet," said Margaret, demurely; "I am going to meet my beau, and two is company, you know."

Away she posted to Mr. Lewis Nathan, who welcomed her right gladly.

"I was afraid I was going to lose you, my dear," he said. "I thought you had forgotten me."

"I never forget a friend," replied Margaret; "I am like my poor mother, Mr. Nathan. Did she ever forget you?"

She chatted about odd things for a few minutes before she came to the point. She even took a customer out of Mr. Nathan's hands, and sold the man a coat and a waistcoat for half as much again as Mr. Nathan would have obtained for them; true, she sweetened the articles with smiles and flattering words, and sent the customer away, dazed and entranced. Mr. Nathan looked on with undisguised admiration.

"What a saleswoman you would have made!" he exclaimed, raising his hands. "You talked to the man as though you had been born in the business, my dear—born in the business!"

"The fact is, Mr. Nathan," said Margaret, with brazen audacity, "I am a very clever woman; and besides, I am an actress, and know how to wheedle the man." She sighed pensively, and added, "But I am a fool with it all. I can sell a coat, but I can't serve my dearest friends. Oh, that I were a man, and had the brains of a man!"

With a humorous look Mr. Lewis Nathan placed his hands to his head. "Here is a man's head," said he, "and a man's brains, very much at your service, my dear."

"Come along, then," she cried. "It is hard if you and I can't win when we go into partnership. What do you say, now? Shall we become partners?"

"My dear," said the old rascal, "I should like to take you as a partner for life."

"It is a good job for me," said Margaret, archly. "that you are not thirty years younger. As it is, I have almost lost my heart to you."

This incorrigible creature could no more help flirting than she could help talking—and she had a woman's tongue to do the latter.

Binding him over to secrecy, she told him the whole story; he listened attentively.

"As I was doing my hair this morning," said Margaret, in conclusion, "and looking into the glass—"

"I should like to have been behind you, my dear," interrupted Mr. Nathan.

"Be quiet, Lathario! As I looked into the glass this morning I said to myself, Margaret, there's only one person among your acquaintance who is clever enough to assist you; that person is Mr. Nathan." But before I flew to you, I had a good look at the crow's feet which this trouble is bringing into my eyes. I am growing quite careworn.

"I should like to see those crow's feet."

"Well, look at them," and she placed her face close to his.

Mr. Nathan gazed into her sparkling eyes, which flashed their brightest glances at him, and then laughed at her outright.

"You're a barbarian," cried Margaret. "You had better call me an unbelieving Jew, at once," said Mr. Nathan, rubbing his hands. "You're thrown away as a Christian, my dear, completely thrown away. You ought to have been one of the chosen people."

She rose, and made him a mocking courtesy. "Thank you, I am quite contented as I am. But let us be serious. Say something to the point. You have heard the story."

"It is an old story," he observed; "love against money. Here is money; here is love." He held out his two hands to represent a pair of scales, one hand raised considerably above the other. "See, my dear, how money weighs down love."

"I see. Your hand with love in it is nearest to heaven; your hand with money in it is nearest to—the other side of the moon."

"Perhaps so; perhaps so; but the plot of this play is to be played out on earth, my dear, isn't it? I have seen it a hundred times on the stage, and so have you."

"And love always wins," she said, vivaciously. "Yes," rejoined Mr. Nathan, dryly, "on the stage, always. Never in real life."

"I won't have never!" she cried, impetuously. "It does sometimes win, even in this sordid world. And if it never has done so before, it must win now. Why, if your cunning and my wit are not a match for a greedy, worldly, hard-hearted old man, I would as lief have been born without brains as with them."

"Hush, hush, my dear. Let me think a bit."

He pondered for a little while.

"There was a mathematician—what was his name?—ah, Archimedes—who said he would move the world if he could find a crevice for his lever. My dear we have neither lever nor crevice. We must get the lever first. Now, where does this old gentleman keep his skeleton?"

She stared at him in amazement. "His skeleton!" she exclaimed.

"His skeleton, my dear; that's what we want. He keeps it somewhere. I've got mine, and I keep it where no eye but my own can see it. We've all got one. If we could get hold of this old gentleman's, we might do something. It is in his house, depend upon it."

"If he has, I have not heard of it. Oh, yes," she cried excitedly, contradicting herself; "Bluebeard's room! He has a Bluebeard's room in the house. Mr. Hunter told me of it."

Mr. Nathan chuckled. "What is in that room, Margaret?"

"How should I know? I have never been in it." He gave her a reproachful look. "If you hadn't told me so yourself I should not have believed it. A Bluebeard's room in the house, and you've never seen it!"

"A clever woman like you! You'll tell me next, I shouldn't wonder, that you have never peeped through the keyhole."

"I do tell you so; I never have peeped through the keyhole."

It was evident from Mr. Nathan's tone that Margaret had fallen several degrees in his estimation. "My

dear," he said, "that room may contain the very thing we want—the lever."

"But suppose he keeps it locked up?"

"Then locks, bolts, and bars must fly asunder." Mr. Nathan sang these words in a fine bass voice, and rising with a brisk air said, "You must get me into that room, Margaret."

"I must first get you into the house."

"I am coming with you now. The old gentleman is away, you say; no time like the present. We'll strike the iron while it's hot, my dear. I constitute myself your friend Gerald's tailor, and I am going to take his measure. As you have never peeped through the keyhole, I suppose you have never tried the handle of the door?"

"Never."

"I will take long odds it is unlocked. Come along, my dear."

At another time Margaret might have had scruples, but her interest in the stake she was playing for was so great that she was determined to leave no stone unturned to win the day. So she accompanied Mr. Nathan to Mr. Weston's house, where they found only Lucy—Gerald, for a wonder, being absent from her. Acting under Mr. Nathan's instructions, Margaret got rid of Lucy, so that the two conspirators might be said to have had the house to themselves.

"Now, my dear," said Mr. Nathan, "take me to the room. Of course you know where it is."

"Not for a certainty," replied Margaret; "but I suspect."

She led Mr. Nathan to a door at the end of a passage, the last room but one in which was Mr. Weston's study. She tried the handle of the door, and it turned within her hand. The door was unlocked.

"I told you so," said Mr. Nathan, with a quiet chuckle. "Sister Ann, Sister Ann, do you see any one coming?"

"I am frightened to go in," said Margaret, shrinking back.

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense; we sha'n't have our heads bitten off."

She followed him into the room, but saw nothing to alarm her. There was but little furniture: two chairs, a table, and a desk, all in a very dusty condition. The windows had not been cleaned for some time, and it was evident that no use was made of the room. Mr. Nathan opened a cupboard—it was empty; tried a desk—it was locked. If it was a Bluebeard's room, and contained a secret, it was well hidden; the only thing to excite comment was that a number of pictures were hanging with their faces turned to the wall.

To preserve them from the dust, I should say," observed Mr. Nathan; "one—two—three—thirteen of 'em, my dear. We'll have a peep at them, at all events."

They were all portraits, and were all painted by the same hand. Mr. Nathan seemed to find some cause for curiosity in this circumstance. One of the portraits, Margaret said, was like Mr. Weston when he was a young man.

"Taken thirty years ago, at least," said Mr. Nathan, replacing the pictures in their original position. "There is something in it, my dear. If the old gentleman has a secret, it lies in these pictures."

"What is to be done now?" asked Margaret, in despair.

"Well, my dear, it's a puzzle. But we'll try and work it out. We must put our heads together, and use stratagem. Don't be downcast; nothing is done without courage. We won't be beaten if we can help it. Come and see me to-morrow, and in the meantime get at the story of these pictures, if you can. I dare say the old gentleman has told Mr. Hunter something about them."

They left Bluebeard's room in a not very hopeful frame of mind.

XII.

MR. HUNTER DECLARES THAT HONESTY HAS DIED OUT OF THE WORLD.

EVENTS, however, were brought to a climax somewhat suddenly, without Margaret's intervention. On the day following the peep into Bluebeard's room, Mr. Weston announced that he intended giving an evening party, and that he had already invited his friends. The party would take the form of an early dance.

"Really early," said Mr. Weston, "for I don't like late hours. They have all promised to be here by half-past eight o'clock."

He told Gerald privately that Miss Forester and her family would be among the guests. Miss Forester was the young lady whom he had fixed upon for his son, and he requested Gerald to pay her particular attention. The young fellow listened in silence.

"You will not leave us on this evening," said Mr. Weston to Mr. Hunter.

But Mr. Weston was compelled to go to the theatre. It happened, however, that he had but a small part to play, and that he could attend the party by ten o'clock.

Mr. Weston was very curious to know the nature of the business that took his friend away every evening, and Mr. Hunter had a difficulty in parrying the questions.

Margaret knew beforehand that some great magnates of the county would be present, with their wives and daughters, and she determined that Lucy should not be eclipsed by any lady in Devonshire. She dressed Lucy with exquisite taste, and no fairer flower was ever seen. Lucy had improved wonderfully during the past fortnight; love had brought the roses to her cheeks. It was strange that the affectionate bearing of the young lovers toward each other should hitherto have escaped Mr. Weston's notice; but this was partly owing to the fact of the old gentleman being exceedingly shortsighted. On many occasions, when Lucy and Gerald were together in the grounds, he perhaps with his arm around her waist, Mr. Weston seeing them from a distance, he said, "That must be Lucy and Gerald;" and when he fussed about for his glasses, and prepared to fix them on his nose, Margaret, who was invariably by his side, turned his attention adroitly, blessing the circumstance that he could not see a dozen yards before him. I am afraid that she had been guilty more than once of secreting his glasses, to the old gentleman's annoyance; she did not mind his pettishness, as you know, she was thoroughly unscrupulous.

Once, when Lucy and Gerald were within twenty yards of them in the garden, suspiciously close together, Margaret unblushingly took Mr. Weston's glasses, which he was rubbing with his handkerchief preparatory to putting them to use—from his hand, and the ribbon from his neck, and saying, "Really, now, can one see

with these things?" fixed them on her own nose, and looked about her like an old grandmother, making so pretty a picture that the old gentleman was absorbed in admiration; during which little piece of comedy Lucy and Gerald escaped. At other times, Margaret twitted him with wearing glasses constantly.

"They make you look so old," she expostulated. "I am old, my dear," he replied.

"You old! Nonsense! You're a young man yet."

And although Mr. Weston deprecated the assertion, he was not displeased with it, and suffered much by frequently depriving himself of the artificial aids to sight. What he was ignorant of was clear to the eyes of every other person in the house. All the servants talked of the love-making that was going on between Gerald and Lucy, and as the old gentleman seemed to sanction it, the servants decided that it would be a match. They thoroughly sympathized with their young master and their mistress that was to be, for Cupid was as busy in the kitchen as in the drawing-room. A most impartial young god. I have seen him busily at work, in rooms high and low, with fine ladies and common kitchen wenches, bestowing his attentions equally upon silk and cotton; I have seen him where silk and cotton are not appreciated, at the other end of the world, walking suddenly by the side of dusky savages in nature. If I had the time I would write a chapter on this theme; it is a temptation, because the subject is so new and novel; but space will not permit of it.

Mr. Weston, however, was not short-sighted on the evening of his party. The guests arrived, and the rooms were very brilliant. Lucy was the loveliest girl among them. Margaret came next, although she was dressed very simply in black. But she had the art of "putting on things" becomingly, an art which not all the members of her sex possess. Miss Forester was present, with her mamma, beautifully dressed, and very stately. Miss Forester's mamma was aware of Mr. Weston's wish, and approved of it. Gerald was in every way a suitable match for her daughter, and she was prepared to be exceedingly gracious to the young gentleman. Not so Miss Forester; she had an attachment elsewhere, of which her mamma was ignorant, and being a young lady of spirit and determination, she had quite made up her mind that she would not mate with Gerald Weston. But she kept her sentiments to herself; she had no confidant, and desired none. So, when the music struck up for the first dance, these little wheels were in full motion, and gradually and surely worked a result unexpected to all. In the opening dance, Mr. Weston saw Gerald walking to the set with Lucy on his arm. Now, Mr. Weston had particularly wished Gerald to dance this first set with Miss Forester; it would have looked very significant. Mrs. Forester was also a close observer, and was disappointed by Gerald's conduct. Miss Forester was perfectly satisfied with it. Gerald and Lucy, quite unconscious of the working of these small wheels, enjoyed the dance to its full; they were in a heaven of delight, and the persons around them might have been so many dummies, they were so lost in their feelings for each other. Mr. Weston consoled himself by the reflection that Gerald might have deemed it proper to pay his first attentions to this lady-guest in his father's house and the daughter of an old friend. He waited for the second dance. Gerald danced with Margaret. Mrs. Forester bit her lips, and calm agitation stirred her breast. This lady was never violent in her emotions.

"Your father is watching us," said Margaret to Gerald.

Gerald made no reply; he was dancing with Margaret, but his thoughts were with Lucy, and his eyes were upon her. Margaret repeated her observation.

"Ah, yes," he then said, detecting no meaning in it. "I think," said our shrewd conspirator, "that he would have preferred you to dance with Miss Forester."

"I prefer to dance with Lucy—and you. The last two words were added as an afterthought."

Margaret was not offended; she was alarmed; she did not like Mr. Weston's looks.

"You must ask Miss Forester to dance immediately," she said to Gerald.

Gerald obeyed her. He asked Miss Forester to dance. Miss Forester was engaged. Very contented, Gerald strolled away to Lucy, and the next moment the lovers were again in sentimental labyrinth. Margaret understood the task of soothing and amusing Mr. Weston, and succeeded for a time. Then she devoted herself for a certain purpose, to Miss Forester; she wished to discover the state of that young lady's affections. But she met her match; after a quarter of an hour's confidential small-talk conversation, Margaret was no wiser than before. At ten o'clock Mr. Hunter came, and for a little while Mr. Weston lost sight of his disturbance. But he planted a thorn in the breast of his friend. He introduced him to Miss Forester, and said, a few minutes afterward:

"That is the young lady Gerald will marry."

Every trace of color left Mr. Hunter's face. He turned to see how Lucy and Gerald were engaged. They were not together. Gerald was now dancing with Miss Forester; their faces were very bright and animated; indeed, to tell you a secret known only at this time to those two, they had come to a little private understanding, arrived at without direct words. I assure you, which had given satisfaction to both. If words had been spoken, they would have run something in this way:

Miss Forester. "I love another person, and, notwithstanding my mamma's wishes, I shall not marry you."

Gerald. "I love another person, and, notwithstanding my father's wishes, shall not make love to you."

Not a word of this dialogue was spoken, but nothing could have been more plainly expressed. Thereupon Gerald and Miss Forester immediately became greater friends than they had ever been, and were absolutely—in the judgment of outsiders—flirting together most conspicuously. In Mr. Hunter's eyes it was not flirtation; it was love-making. But Lucy's face was bright also; there was not a cloud on it. He turned to Margaret; their eyes met, but he could not read the expression in her face. Truth to tell, she was anxious and nervous, and was beginning to lose confidence in

him. All this while he was left Mr. Weston, with the words hanging on his lips:

"That is the young lady Gerald will marry."

"Is it settled, then?" inquired Mr. Hunter, striving, and striving in vain, to master his agitation.

"Quite settled," replied Mr. Weston, without a twinge.

Mr. Hunter was bewildered. Could Gerald have been playing his girl false? It looked like it. There was only one thing that would give the lie to this—possibility that Margaret was mistaken when she declared that Gerald and Lucy to be lovers. He groaned involuntarily as he thought that all evidence was against this possibility. He was awakened from a bitterly beautiful dream, a dream which had clothed his daughter's life with happiness; again was the future dark before him. Mr. Weston told the lie intentionally; he had heard remarks during the evening upon the open attentions which Gerald was bestowing upon Lucy, and he did not choose that his old friend should remain in doubt of his opinion upon such proceedings.

"When you and I were talking about my son's prospects, I told you that he had entangled himself in some way with a girl far below him—you remember, Gerald."

"I remember very well."

"That fancy is over, I am glad to say; he has evidently forgotten all about it. The fact is, my boy is impressionable, and cannot resist a pretty face. Why, some people might fancy he was making love to Lucy; but I know him, I know him. It is his way. If he saw a new and pretty face to-morrow, he would begin admiring it immediately; he couldn't help it; it is in his nature. He will cool down presently; when he is married I shall indeed be a happy man. You will come to the wedding, Gerald, and Lucy, and Margaret."

Then we must get Lucy married. Do you know?" and here he peered, not without anxiety, into his friend's face—"that many another father would have been disturbed by what I have heard to-night. One or two foolish persons have said—you'll not mind my repeating the words—that it looked as though Gerald were making love to Lucy. But we know better—old friend? we know better. He means nothing by it—absolutely nothing—and Lucy, of course, understands that. A girl easily sees, and instinctively judges between earnestness and lightness. And then I remember what you said when we were talking upon this matter; you would not allow your daughter to receive Gerald's attentions without my consent; you would not allow her to marry him without my consent. Those were the words, Gerald?"

"Those were my words," said Mr. Hunter, coldly and mechanically.

"And you never broke a promise—never, old friend?"

"Never."

"And you would not break this?"

"Not if it broke my heart," replied Mr. Hunter, with a shudder of pain.

"And my consent is given elsewhere," proceeded Mr. Weston, with nervous satisfaction, "given elsewhere, as I told you. As for your bright little Lucy—have you not noticed her gables and multicolored windows, as to make it appear more like the retreat of a wealthy gentleman than a house of public entertainment. The principal entrance stands fully thirty yards away from the public road or path, and to reach it you have to pass through an antique wooden gate and a carefully-tended garden, as delightfully irregular as the house to which it is attached. There is not a square room in the entire establishment, and although from time to time additions have been made to it in the shape of a wing here and a wing there, modern innovations and modern ideas of comfort have not been allowed to spoil its character. Imbedded in the midst of its own grounds, in the rich soil of which flowers and fruit-trees are abundant and beautifully luxuriant, The Silver Flagon is a standing reproach to those Tower of Babel hotels which it is the fashion now to build."

Fortunately for those to whom it is known, and who enjoy and appreciate its comforts, its proprietor, Gideon Rowe, was, in his ideas, as old-fashioned as his hotel. The Silver Flagon had been in the family of the Rowes for many generations, and had been handed down from father to son for more than a century; and the various members regarded it with so much pride and affection that it had grown to be looked upon more in the light of an heir-loom than a speculation. Gideon Rowe, at sixty-five years of age, was a pleasant, even-tempered, good-looking gentleman, straight as an arrow, with a clear eye and a wholesome color in his face—which he had caught, mayhap, from some of his famous apples—and with every probability of twenty more good years before him. He was a man of independent property, and he carried on the business of The Silver Flagon as much for pleasure and occupation as for profit. It was probably for this reason that the majority of those who frequented it were gentlemen, who care for nothing but drinking their old ale and cher, and sometimes their wine, out of the old-fashioned silver flagons, which it was the whim of Gideon Rowe's great grandfather to have made, and of which there were no fewer than one hundred and twenty in the hotel.

It was seldom that any signs of bustle were to be noticed in The Silver Flagon; but on a certain Wednesday in the middle of August—some few weeks after the occurrence of the incidents heretofore narrated—there were signs of unusual activity in the lower story of the hotel. The cooks were busy, and there was much hurrying to and fro; it was evident that there was a larger number of attendants than usual in the hotel, and that the evening was going to be a good one. The principal room of The Silver Flagon, which was in shape of an irregular oblong, and sufficiently commodious to accommodate a large number of guests, was situated on the ground-floor, and at six o'clock on the evening of this Wednesday in August presented an appearance which it is necessary to describe. The table was laid for a distinguished dinner party. That it was to be a dinner of the best kind was evident from the furnishing of the table, which comprised the finest plate of The Silver Flagon and a brilliant display of glass. A number of attendants, dressed in court suits of black, with black knee-breeches and black silk stockings, were perfecting their order, and the direction of the chief before the arrival of the guests.

Although it was still daylight the candles in the handsome candelabra were already lighted, the effect of which was not only to darken the room, but to throw corners almost completely into shade. Pictures hung upon the walls—not landscapes, nor scenes of rural or domestic life; the subjects were neither historical nor allegorical; every picture was a portrait. Counting them, you would find that there were exactly thirteen portraits, all of the same size, and all handsomely and uniformly framed. That they were painted by one hand was not to be doubted, and being so, and being of a uniform size and uniformly framed, it might reasonably have been supposed that they represented mem-

of a life. His friend was false to him, unworthy of him. In that moment, also, his own nature seemed to undergo a change.

"Where is Lucy?" he asked, loudly and sternly, of Margaret.

Margaret, without answering him, led him from the room, and he supposed she was about to lead him to his daughter. But Margaret's first intention was to remove him from the observation of the guests, who were already beginning to talk of the incident. That girl the daughter of an actor! they said to one another. Well, it was no wonder she was so pretty! They know how to make themselves up, my dear! As for Gerald Weston, his attentions to her were now easily to be understood. But they were astonished at old Mr. Weston introducing such people. The girl and her friend had been living in the house for a fortnight! Indeed! And so on, and so on.

Fortunately for them, and for Mr. Hunter also, he was out of hearing of this gossip. Margaret led him into the air, and the first persons they saw were Lucy and Gerald strolling toward the house. Mr. Hunter's mind was thrown off its balance by grief and passion. He tore Lucy from Gerald's arm, and cried:

"Gerald Weston, are you a coward or a villain?"

"Mr. Hunter!" exclaimed Gerald, confounded by this startling address.

"Dear friend," entreated Margaret, "be calm."

Lucy looked imploringly from one to the other.

"No more fair words," cried Mr. Hunter; "I have had enough of them! Honesty has died out of the world." He turned to Mr. Weston, who, fearing a scene, had followed his old friend into the garden, and said, in a bitter, passionate tone, "Never more will I hold out the hand of friendship to you, never more will I set foot beneath your roof until you have atoned for the wrong you have done me and mine. Go you to your wife's grave and erase the words you have written on her tomb; they are a mockery there, and rise up in judgment against you. Come, my child, this is no place for us. We must look elsewhere for truth and faithfulness!"

PART THE THIRD. THE DINNER OF THIRTEEN.

I.

STRANGE PREPARATIONS FOR THE

bers of the same family; but it was clear that this was not the case. With here and there an exception, they bore no likeness to each other, and in some instances the contrast in the faces and general character of the individuals, as indicated by outlines and expression, was very remarkable. The originals were of various ages, from eighteen or nineteen to sixty mayhap. Casting your eyes around the walls, you would instinctively have paused at the picture of a stern-looking man, the lines in whose face spoke of invincible determination; his dress was pretentiously plain and sombre; one hand, which grasped the back of a chair, grasped it so firmly that the veins were seen to stand out; his lips were set, and there was a frown in his eyes. Whether by accident or design, his picture was so hung as to cause his cruel eyes to bear directly on two faces of a very opposite character from his. They were the portraits of a young lady and a young gentleman—she probably not more than nineteen years of age, he some three or four years older. The girl was in the full flush of youthful beauty, a rose whose leaves were opening to the sunlight of life, delicately nurtured evidently, and whose face was almost spiritualized by its extreme sensitiveness. In this respect the young man, who was also handsome and well-formed, singularly resembled her, and yet there was no likeness between them. These young persons were smiling on each other. Your eyes would also have dwelt with interest upon the portrait of a man about thirty years of age, with a kind and even benevolent face, fair, and with bright blue eyes. Then there was the portrait of one whom you would instantly set down as an old maid, from the precise and severely demure fashion of her clothes, from the set of her poke-bonnet, and from the sharp but not ill-natured expression on her face. Next to her was a portrait of a very different character—that of a rakish, genial, full-blooded man, with the pleasantest of mouths and the merriest of eyes, out of which joviality beamed; his hat was set on one side of his head, and between his fingers dangled a cane with a dandy tassel. All these persons were attired in the fashion of a bygone generation.

The room was well supplied with choice flowers. Two folding windows which faced the west opened upon a veranda-terrace, the steps of which led into the gardens by which The Silver Flagon was surrounded. This terrace was also freely and beautifully decorated with flowers, and was comfortably furnished with easy and other chairs and convenient small tables, and a couple of fur rugs spread on the ground, formed the most luxurious and delicious after-dinner lounge it is possible to imagine.

Exactly as a quarter past six o'clock was proclaimed in thin, silvery notes by the black-marble clock on the sideboard, Gideon Rowe, the landlord and proprietor of The Silver Flagon, entered the room. He was in evening dress, and there was a natural dignity in his bearing which proclaimed him master. More than this, he was a gentleman. There was an air upon him which betokened the approach of an event of a grave nature. With attentive eyes—and yet with something of a sad abstraction in his manner—he examined the appointments of the room, and saw that everything was in its place. With his eyes he made the circuit of the table, and counted the chairs which were placed for the guests.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve—thirteen." Therefore it was clear that thirteen persons were expected to dine. Then he ran his eyes over the attendants, and counted them, from one to thirteen. One of these was the chief, and addressing him by the name of Steele, Gideon Rowe called him to his side.

"Your arrangements seem to be perfect, Mr. Steele," "I think you will find them so, sir," replied Mr. Steele.

"This is—let me see—the eighth year you have officiated."

"This makes the eighth year, sir."

"We have seen some changes, Mr. Steele."

"We have, sir."

"I know I can depend upon you to carry out the affair with discretion, whatever happens."

"Thank you, sir."

There was the slightest tinge of surprise in Mr. Steele's tone, which did not escape Mr. Rowe's observation. Mr. Rowe made no remark upon it, however, but repeated:

"Whatever happens. After all, it is an exceedingly simple affair, and I shall be glad to see everything well and discreetly done. You have the entire superintendence. Even if I wished, I could not undertake the management, being, as it were, one of them." This with a glance at the portrait on the wall.

"You will have no reason to complain, sir."

"The dinner will be served at seven precisely. There must be no mistake about that especially. When the clock strikes we will commence."

"It shall be done, sir."

"Have the men been instructed in their duties?"

"Yes, sir."

But Mr. Rowe deemed it necessary to address a few words to them collectively. He called them together.

"Mr. Steele hesitated a moment."

"I have been disappointed in the man I wished to engage for this service."

"But you have another?" said Mr. Rowe, quickly.

"Oh, yes."

"And a dependable man?"

"Quite dependable, to all appearance, and from his credentials."

"That is all that is necessary. His duties are onerous, but not burdensome. Let me see him."

Mr. Steele went out by the door behind the screen, and returned with an elderly man, dressed like the others. His iron-gray hair was cropped close to his head, and there was a forced composure in his face, as though he had been schooling himself for his task. Gideon Rowe scrutinized him keenly.

"Your name is—"

"Michael Lee."

"You answer promptly, like a soldier."

"I am not one, sir."

"You are an elderly man—about my own age, I should say. Is your eyesight good?"

"Fairly good for my age."

"I ask because in the place where you will stand the light is rather dim. I must test you." He looked around for a newspaper or other printed matter, and finding none, drew a letter from his pocket. It was in a man's writing, and a spasm came into his face as he gazed at it. He held it open at a little distance from Michael Lee.

"Is your eyesight good enough to read this?"

Michael Lee changed color, and his lips trembled.

"You cannot read it?"

"I can read it quite well," replied Michael Lee, and continued, in a gentle, sad tone, reading from the letter: "So now, my dear old dad, good-bye, and God bless you. With fondest love, your affectionate scapegrace of a son, Philip Rowe."

Gideon Rowe paused before he spoke again.

"That is a good credential for your eyes."

"The letter is from your son," observed Michael Lee, respectfully.

"Yes, from my poor boy. Written a long time ago. He is dead. Thank you for that mark of your sympathy."

"I also am a father."

"You can understand, then, the kind of grief that oppresses a man when he loses an only child, whom he loved very dearly. But we are wandering from the point. For the business before us, you are all the better for not being too young."

Michael Lee made an effort to shake off his sad humor, and answered somewhat briskly. "So that some good comes to one for being old. Though I should rather say that I should be all the better for being a little younger. I should have no objection to my ripening time coming over again. But time that ripens us, withers us; time that withers us, kills us."

"Ah, well," said Gideon Rowe, with reflective nods, and gazing in surprise at Michael Lee, "we must drop away, and make room for others." He cast a strangely serious look at the thirteen chairs arranged round the table.

"You are a superior man, I perceive."

Still striving to rally his spirits, Michael Lee said:

"One other man besides yourself, sir, has sometimes thought so."

"Any one whom I know?"

"Yes, sir; you know him slightly."

"Who may he be?"

"I, myself."

Gideon Rowe smiled.

"Mr. Steele did well to select you. Now, pay careful heed to what I am about to say. Your duties to-night are not heavy. You are to stand as doorkeeper, and all you have to do is to act strictly in accordance with the instructions I give you. Your position will be there—pointing to the door at the north end of the room, which led on to the veranda. "You will stand outside that door, and admit only those who establish their right to enter. And only those have the right of entrance whose names are written on this paper."

Michael Lee received the paper from Gideon Rowe, and read the names aloud:

Reuben Thorne.

James Blanchard.

Henry Holmes.

Rachel Holmes.

Thomas Chatterton.

Ephraim Goldberg.

Dinah Dim.

Stephen Viner.

Caroline Miller.

Edward Blair.

Clarence Coveney.

Frederick Fairfax.

Richard Weston.

"You will keep the paper as a guide," said Gideon Rowe, over whose countenance shades of varying expression had passed as the names were read, the most noticeable being one of sad pity at the name of Caroline Miller. Not another person but those whose names are set down there must you allow to pass in, under any pretense. But you may still be liable to make a mistake, as you have never seen these ladies and gentlemen. That contingency is provided for; examine this."

He placed in the hands of Michael Lee a small piece of ivory in the shape of a heart. Michael Lee examined it with curiosity. Gideon Rowe continued:

"You will neither admit nor announce any lady or gentleman who does not produce a heart shaped like this in ivory with his or her name written upon it in red letters."

"That is lucky," observed Michael Lee.

"What is lucky?"

Michael Lee answered: "My grandmother wore an ivory charm, with signs upon it, which was given to her by a gypsy woman; she had a superstitious regard for it."

Gideon Rowe considered for a few moments whether Michael Lee's words were intended to be taken in jest or earnest, but he could not resolve the point.

"Very well," he said; "now you can go to your post."

Here is a seat, you see. You may find your work somewhat dull, but you will contrive not to fall asleep."

"When all the persons," said Michael Lee, "whose name are set down here have arrived, will it be necessary for me to keep to my post?"

"No," replied Gideon Rowe, with another strange look; "when all the persons whose names are on that paper have arrived, your duties are at an end."

II.

ARRIVAL OF BUT ONE GUEST AT A DINNER FOR THIRTEEN.

LEAVING Michael Lee at his post outside the door, Gideon Rowe went to the folding windows, and drew the curtains over them. He lingered by the window to inhale the faint perfume of lavender which the breeze brought into the room.

"Summer is dying," he murmured.

Beautiful as was the evening, there was something inexpressibly sad in the appearance of this room, with its dim light, and the black clothing of the attendants, who moved about like shadows.

"Mr. Steele," said Gideon Rowe, you understand that the first guest who arrives will preside at the head of the table. I will wait upon him myself."

"As heretofore, sir."

All the arrangements being completed, the attendants stood in silence behind the chairs, forming a black hedge around the table. Gideon Rowe glanced anxiously at the clock. The hands indicated eighteen minutes to seven. That he was singularly and powerfully agitated was evident, but he controlled his excitement by a strong effort. Another minute passed and another. The clock struck three-quarters past six, steps were heard on the veranda, and almost immediately afterward Michael Lee opened the door by which he was stationed, and advancing a step, called out:

"Mr. Richard Weston."

The sound of Michael Lee's voice afforded relief to every person in the room, for all were beginning to be oppressed by the gloom and silence which prevailed. Mr. Weston, as he entered, glanced before him with a shrinking air, and grasping Gideon Rowe's hand firmly, as though he derived comfort from the contact, shaded his eyes with his left hand, and peered timidly at the attendants, whose faces he could not see in the uncertain light.

"Only the servants," observed Mr. Rowe, answering the look, "I am glad to welcome you."

"Thank you, Mr. Rowe, thank you," said Mr. Weston. "I am the first, then?"

"You are the first," replied Mr. Rowe, gravely. "I am almost ashamed to confess it," said Mr. Weston, "though I don't know why I should be ashamed to confess it to you, for we are old cronies, eh, Rowe? old cronies—but before I entered the room, and indeed for many days past, I have had a fearful and unreasonable fancy that, that—"

Gideon Rowe, with a serious smile, supplied the words which Mr. Weston was at a loss to utter. "That some one might have been before you, and deprived you of your position at the head of the table."

"It was so, I assure you," assented Mr. Weston; "but I have been much upset lately—crossed and thwarted on all sides, and where I had the best right to expect obedience."

"I have heard something—rumor is many-tongued, you know."

"Yes, yes; and tells lies, and invents, and makes black white. I can speak to you as an old friend. Tell me what you have heard."

"It is an impertinence for people to speak of those things, for they are family matters; and, indeed, it is difficult to bring vague rumors into definite words. Briefly as I understand it, Gerald—"

"My son—yes."

"Refuses to marry the lady you have chosen for him, loving another lady and having pledged himself to her. That much has reached my understanding, through the rumors I have heard. Has Gerald really pledged himself to a lady of whom you disapprove, and does he really love her?"

"Love her! No! It is a fancy which will be gone in a few weeks. The boy doesn't know his own mind."

"That is not the impression I have formed of Gerald. He is somewhat obstinate in his likes and dislikes. And he really has pledged himself to this lady, and she really is a lady?"

"She is the daughter of an old friend of mine," replied Mr. Weston, with nervous hesitation; "of an old friend who has inflicted great pain upon me. She is a good girl—a good girl, I do believe—but not the wife for Gerald, not the wife for my boy."

"Why not? Because she is poor?"

"Ah, you have heard, then. Can you not see that Gerald has a position to maintain, and there are duties which society exacts from us? Classes must be kept apart. But do not speak any further of this now; it is not the time. On the anniversary of this night my mind is occupied by but one subject." He glanced at the table. "It seems but yesterday—it seems but yesterday! The same old silver—the same old service—and some of the same old wine, eh, Mr. Rowe? the same old wine."

"The same, Mr. Weston; there is but little of it left. But it will last our time, and then will come new wine, new fashions, new men and women, new everything to grow old as we have grown old, and to make way for other fashions and other men and women, as our fashions and ourselves are making way for them."

"There are some things that do not seem to change," said Mr. Weston, looking toward the clock, and feeling in his pockets. "The same old clock, too. But I cannot see the hands. Ah, here they are!" He had been searching his pockets for his spectacles, and he now produced the case. "Looking at my eyes now, you wouldn't think that I am growing more short-sighted every day, eh, Mr. Rowe?"

"Your eyes are as bright as they were thirty years ago."

"So they seem to me, but they deceive me, they deceive me—as everything else. Bless my soul! they are gone!" He referred to his spectacles; his spectacle case was empty.

"Shall I send for them?" asked Gideon Rowe.

"No, no; they would not be found, perhaps. I must do without my eyes to-night. The clock is right, eh? What does it mark now?"

"Thirteen minutes to seven."

"Thank you. As I was saying, there are some things

that do not change. The Silver Flagon, for instance—there is no change in that."

"There is no change in it from my first remembrance of it. I should like it never to change."

used to wish that it might be carried on in exactly the same way, and in the same old fashion, as it has been carried on during this last hundred years. But it is in the nature of things to change, and my wish will not be fulfilled. Had other things turned out as I hoped, my desire would almost certainly have been frustrated by the new scheme for the branch railway that is being talked about. I am told that its course is designed immediately in the rear of the garden."

He looked regretfully toward the folding windows, through the transparent curtains of which the sky could be seen reddening in the light of the declining sun. One might fancy one's self almost out of the world here; but if the railway scheme be carried out, good-bye to the charm of perfect peacefulness which rests upon The Silver Flagon. Good-bye, perhaps, to The Silver Flagon itself. The thought hurts me, but not as much as it would have done had my dear boy been alive."

"Rowe," exclaimed Mr. Weston, in a sympathizing, wondering tone. "You have had news of Philip, then?"

"He is dead, poor lad! You know how I loved the boy, and how my heart was bound up in him. I cherished the hope that, when his wild fit was over, he would come home and take my place here. The dear lad was working to bring home a hatful of money, to repay me for what I had done for him. As though I needed repaying! Shame drove him away, and kept him away while he was poor. He did not know his father's heart."

"How did the news come?" asked Mr. Weston, softly.

"His wife brought it—a dear, good girl. She is in the house now, and will remain here as my daughter. You shall see her in good time, and hear the sad story from her own lips. I think the news would have killed me but for her."

"My Gerald and your Philip were good friends," murmured Mr. Weston. "Gerald will grieve, indeed, when he hears the news."

"Life is full of disappointment, full of changes. Man proposes, God disposes. I thought I should die with my Philip by my bedside in this peaceful spot, and he dies at the other end of the world, sixteen thousand miles away, while I am still a hale old man. I have the comfort of knowing that his heart was beating with love for me—the dear lad." He paused for a moment. "Notwithstanding this grief, I still have something to be grateful for, and I bow with submission to the Divine will. I have a new daughter, such a girl as I would have chosen for my son, and mayhap a great blessing will be bestowed upon me in the course of a couple of months, and my Philip may live again in his son. And have I not still the dear old Silver Flagon? I look upon it almost as part of my own flesh and blood. My life is wedded to it by sweet and solemn memories. Why, I remember these old flagons when I could scarcely toddle. I used to look at my face in them when I was a boy; there was one with a long dent in it—here it is now on the sideboard—which seemed to split my face in two."

He gazed wistfully into its polished surface. "It isn't the same face as it was then."

"What does the clock mark now?"

"Eight minutes to seven."

"How slowly the time passes! The moments are clogged with lead."

"It is only the years that fly," said Gideon Rowe. "We watch the minutes and the days, and the years slip by without our heeding them. But all at once we wake to the fact, and a sudden shock comes upon us. Truly we are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

There was nothing singular in the perfect familiarity that existed between the speakers. Gideon Rowe came of an old family (though if he had come of a younger family—a phrase I cannot quite understand—it would have been all the same) who had acquired their money honestly, and he had lived a blameless life. Such a man is the equal of a king. It was to be especially noted that the present conversation was carried on with a careful avoidance—by Mr. Weston most certainly—of a subject which must have been uppermost in their minds, and that directly one paused, the other took up the cue, as though they were desirous that not a moment should pass in silence. Another thing to be noted was, that frequently in the middle of a sentence, Mr. Weston—whether he or his companion was speaking—turned his head over his shoulder toward the door by which Michael Lee was stationed, with a timid, nervous, frightened look, as if expecting to see an apparition there. Another thing to be noted was his studied avoidance of the pictures that were hanging on the walls. If in an unwitting moment he happened to raise his eyes toward the portraits, he turned them hastily away again with visible agitation. The attendants in the room preserved implicit silence while their superiors were conversing. They stood in their places like statues.

"And we fret ourselves so unwisely," continued Mr. Rowe, with something of a wary look toward Mr. Weston; "we torture ourselves so unnecessarily. Instead of enjoying the opportunities which good fortune has placed in the hands of such fortunate ones as you and I, we bring unhappiness upon ourselves by setting our minds upon the accomplishment of certain wishes which we deem to be good, notwithstanding that they distinctly clash with the hopes of those who are dearest to us. We forget that life is short. Let me give you a bit of my philosophy, and apply it to ourselves. Here we stand, having grown from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age—marching from our very cradles into the grave. The changes that come naturally upon us we bear, if we are wise, with patience and resignation; with hope, also, that carries us in our lives to the contemplation of other spheres beyond the grave. There is a wonderful amount of goodness and sweetness in life, with all its sad changes, if we will but see it. What best rewards us—what brings us the most pleasure and satisfaction—is to enjoy this good, in so far as it affects ourselves and others, and to make the very best use of it which lies in our power. You cannot deny that this is a sensible philosophy."

"It sounds so."

"It is not only a sensible, it is a wise philosophy. Let me apply it. Say that I have a child whom I love—the memory of his Philip brought a touching sadness into his tone—"say that this blessing, which I have unhappily lost, is mine. If by any action of mine I can make that child happy, it is surely good and wise

in me to do so, and add to my enjoyment of life. Say that this child, having grown to manhood, with a man's intelligence and a man's hopes, has set his heart upon a certain thing—say, plainly, that he loves a girl who is both virtuous and good, whom he wishes to make his wife, and that I make it my business to thwart him, it is surely unwise in itself, if only in the fact that it brings discomfort to me, that it fills my days with uneasiness, and makes my home unhappy. Now, this is a selfish view, but it is one which occurs to me by way of illustration."

"But say, for the sake of argument," said Mr. Weston, somewhat uneasily, "only for the sake of argument, mind—"

"Very well; for the sake of argument."

"That this child's fancy was a foolish one, and unwise in every sense."

"I don't admit that; but we are only arguing. Pray proceed."

"And that you, his father, saw another and a better way of bringing happiness into his life."

"Who judges that my way is the better way?" demanded Mr. Rowe.

"Yourself."

Mr. Rowe shook his head, and taking a pair of spectacles from his pocket, asked Mr. Weston to use them. Mr. Weston put them on gladly, but they did not suit his sight; all was dim before him. He returned the spectacles to Mr. Rowe.

"I cannot see through them," he said.

"Nonsense, nonsense," replied Mr. Rowe; "you are mistaken. You can."

"I tell you I can not."

"Yet that is just what you insist others can do. You insist that they can see through your spectacles."

"I say, Nonsense, nonsense to you; I understand your trick, but it does not apply in this case. I say that in the difference of opinion between you and your son, which you have spoken of, you are the better judge. You are the older of the two by forty years. You know the world; you have experienced its trials, its temptations, its disappointments; you have seen its follies, its delusions. Therefore you have a perfect right to say to your son, 'My boy, you are wrong; you must conquer your idea—your fancy. Be patient, and time will show you its folly; and one day you will thank me for opposing your wishes.' Why," exclaimed Mr. Weston, raising his voice slightly, in his excitement, "do you not love your son?"

"That is not to be doubted."

"And what you do in this matter, is it not for his good?"

"Ah, my friend, my friend! I may think so, in my obstinacy, but it is I who am wrong. Let us speak plainly. You know it is of your Gerald we are speaking."

"Of course I know it."

"What more can you desire than his happiness? The girl he loves, and has pledged himself to, is poor. It is true; but she is a lady, and is in every way worthy of him. Why imbitter your life and his by standing in his way?"

"One moment, Mr. Rowe," interrupted Mr. Weston; "how do you know all this? Have you seen the girl?"

"I have."

"And her father, have you seen him?"

"No, but I hope soon to do so. From what I have heard, he is a man whom it would be a privilege to call friend."

Mr. Weston made a movement of uneasiness. "The subject pains me; let us cease discussing it."

"We have no time to continue it," said Gideon Rowe, glancing at the clock, "or, despite your wish, I should not allow it to drop. We ourselves were young once, and looked at things with different eyes from those with which we view them now."

"How near to the time is it?"

"But one minute."

During this minute there was silence in the room. Michael Lee's voice was not heard. Mr. Weston moved slowly to the chair at the head of the table. The attendants stood in silence behind the empty chairs. The clock seemed to be the only thing in the room imbued with life. Presently it struck the hour of seven. As the sound of the last stroke was dying away, Gideon Rowe said to Mr. Steele:

"Serve the dinner."

Mr. Richard Weston was the only guest.

III.

ARRIVAL OF UNEXPECTED GUESTS.

STANDING behind the twelve empty chairs, the attendants performed their duties with as much ceremony as could have been expected from them had they been waiting on the most exacting and punctilious guests; but it was not difficult to see that they did not like the service in which they were engaged. From time to time they gazed furtively at each other, and according to the susceptibility of their temperaments, were more or less disturbed by the strangeness of the scene. There was something so ghostlike in this silent dinner, that when the attendants moved they stepped lightly, as though they were fearful of raising the dead. The only persons who were not dismayed at the sight of the empty chairs were Mr. Weston, Mr. Steele, and the proprietor of the Silver Flagon. Indeed, that the chairs were empty seemed to afford satisfaction to at least one of the party—Mr. Weston.

"What has become of your unreasonable fancy?" asked Mr. Rowe.

"Dissolved, thank God!" replied Mr. Weston, with a sigh of relief, draining his glass. "But I had it very strong upon me. We cannot help these superstitious feelings, and in my case there is a distinct cause for them. Words once uttered by Reuben Thorne—"

"Poor Reuben! He was the merriest soul I ever met."

deal of wine, and was in a feverish, excited condition. Michael Lee still kept watch outside the door. The only voices that were heard were the voices of Mr. Weston and Mr. Rowe. This latter person seemed determined not to lose sight of the principal object in his mind, and almost every word he uttered had reference to it.

"At such a time as this," he said, "it is but natural that our thoughts should revert to those who are gone. I am thinking now of my dead Philip, with reference to worldly things. Do you know, friend, that I would cheerfully live the rest of my days in poverty if the sacrifice of my worldly goods would bring my son to life?"

"They are the natural feelings of a father," responded Mr. Weston. "Were I in your place, I would surely do the same."

"And yet how strangely do we regulate our actions with reference to those we love! While they live, we thwart their dearest hopes; when they are gone, we are ready to make the extreme sacrifice upon the altar of our affections. But then it is too late."

He would have proceeded further but that a sudden spasm from Mr. Weston diverted his attention. Following the direction of Mr. Weston's eyes, he turned toward the folding windows.

"Did you hear nothing?" asked Mr. Weston, in a low tone.

"No."

"I fancied," murmured Mr. Weston, in explanation, "that I heard a step upon the veranda."

Mr. Rowe went to the window, and partly drew the curtains aside. The moon was rising, and the soft light could be seen through the opening.

"There is no one there," said Mr. Rowe, returning to Mr. Weston's side. "As I was saying, when we have lost those whom we loved best in the world, and whose natural and innocent desires we thwarted while they lived, we beat our breasts and reproach ourselves."

Again he was interrupted. Michael Lee, the door-keeper, entered the room, and following Mr. Rowe's last word came Michael Lee's announcement:

"Mr. Reuben Thorne."

Mr. Weston's face grew white as the person announced approached and bowed.

"I am late," said the new-comer, dropping into a chair, "but better late than never, they say." He poured out a glass of claret, and rising, said, with another bow to Mr. Weston, "Your health," and again resumed his seat.

"Am I dreaming?" asked Mr. Weston, in a low tone of fear, addressing himself to Mr. Rowe.

Reuben Thorne heard the words, and before Mr. Rowe could speak, himself replied:

"No, faith, it is I who have been dreaming—dreaming for many years. Life is a dream—and death—But we will not speak of that. Live and learn, they say. Let us correct the maxim. Die and learn, is infinitely truer, as all men will find. If we could live and unlearn, it would be better for us. 'Tis a conflict, from the cradle to the grave—a heart against head. And head wins, the rule is. Men would be happier were it otherwise. Better for us to go back, and play at children over again."

He was the exact counterpart of one of the pictures on the wall, so like in every detail of dress and personal appearance that he could not have been more like had he actually been the living embodiment of the portrait, and left the frame without a tenant. But the picture was there and the man was there, and the man looked up at the painted likeness of himself with some kind of satisfaction.

"If my memory serves me," he continued, still addressing Mr. Weston, "it was a good old fashion for the chairman to welcome his guests as they arrived. You seem surprised to see me here, and have addressed me not one word of welcome. At all events, we can drink wine together."

He raised his glass, and Mr. Weston mechanically raised his. Bowing to each other, they emptied their glasses simultaneously. Then Mr. Weston spoke for the first time.

"I remember the words you uttered on the anniversary of our fourth gathering. I recalled them before you entered. You promised to visit the last of the thirteen who was left and take wine with him. You asked if the others would join you; all, nearly all, promised to do so." He shuddered as he spoke.

"The promise will be redeemed by our friends," said Reuben Thorne, "as it is redeemed by me. But I have another purpose in coming to-night."

"What purpose?"

"A purpose which I am not the only one engaged in. Others are with me. You will know more presently. Do you find any change in me?"

"None—it seems as though not a year had passed over your head since I last saw you."

"That is many years ago now. I see a change in you. Your hair is white; you are an old man. Perhaps in another year you too, will have passed away from among men. It will be well for you if you have sown no seeds of unhappiness, which may grow into life miseries when you have gone. Even I, with no human ties, even I, who had no wife or child, would, if I could, live my time over again."

"Yet you were the happiest of all our party," said Mr. Weston, nerving himself by a strong effort to sustain his part in the conversation, gaining courage to do so through the wine which he drank freely; "you can have no regrets."

"I have one." He looked toward the portrait of Stephen Viner with anger. "If I had known what was to occur through that man's villainy—if I had known the end of those two young lives, the melancholy fate of Caroline Miller and Edward Blair, I would have saved them despite the penalty I would have had to pay."

"How would you have saved them?"

"I would have killed the man," said Reuben Thorne, quietly, "who by his cruelty destroyed two innocent lives. I would have killed one to save two."

Mr. Weston scarcely heard these last words; a step upon the veranda drew his attention from Reuben Thorne. Again Michael Lee's voice was heard:

"Clarence Covey."

A man, fifty years of age, entered, dressed as Reuben Thorne was dressed, in the fashion of a bygone generation. He bowed to Mr. Weston, and took his seat.

"Once more," he said, nodding to Reuben Thorne.

"Once more," responded Reuben Thorne. "We were speaking of Stephen Viner."

"He is not here."

"No; but he will come."

Other steps upon the veranda, and presently Michael Lee's voice again:

"Henry Holmes. Rachel Holmes."

Two, whose names only proclaimed them brother and sister, entered, with the same ceremony, and took their seats. They were unlike each other in appearance, and the lady, who was young, seemed the more assured of the two.

"It is long since we met," she said, in soft, clear tones to Mr. Weston, "and Henry was somewhat doubtful of the welcome we should receive."

"Why should he be doubtful?" asked Reuben Thorne. "Every one here has a claim to be present. Is it not so?" to Mr. Weston.

"It is so," replied Mr. Weston.

"And all are welcome," continued Reuben Thorne.

"And all are welcome," repeated Mr. Weston, mechanically. The words seemed to be forced from him.

"Whether the proposition," said Reuben Thorne, "to meet once in every year, as we did for many years—each more or less according to the tenor of his life—was or was not a wise one, it was accepted by all without demur. Let us, then, now that we have met once again, banish all ideas of strangeness from our minds; let us be cordial and friendly to one another, as we once were. This meeting will be the last. Let us be merry; and let only those be sad who have no regrets."

"If that were so in life," said Rachel Holmes, "there would be less sorrow in it."

"Somewhat of a philosophical paradox, that," observed the landlord of The Silver Flagon.

The circumstance of Mr. Rowe taking part in the conversation brought relief to Mr. Weston. The scene in which he was playing a part seemed to be less unreal, and he was less startled by the voice of Michael Lee, the door-keeper, who announced, in quick succession:

"James Blanchard. Thomas Chatterton. Ephraim Goldberg."

Mr. Weston rose and bowed to them as they entered.

"There are eight of us now," said Reuben Thorne, in a cheerful tone; "but five more remain. I remember well the occasion and the motive that first brought us together."

Another guest joined the party in the midst of the speech.

"Frederick Fairfax."

"Nine," continued Reuben Thorne. "If this meeting is less pleasant than the first, it is not a whit less strange. Surely that is Dinah Dim's step upon the veranda."

They all turned their faces to the door.

"Dinah Dim," called out Michael Lee.

An old woman, with snow-white hair, tall and bent, entered the room with a light step, and looked briskly around. Her likeness to her picture on the wall was something marvelous. Not a hair was out of its place; of this there were five rows of curls on either side of her head; mittens on her hands and wrists; her gown of old-fashioned brocade; a scarf across her shoulders; eyes very bright; hands small and white; a complexion like a peach.

"So you are all before me," she said, in quick, silvery tones—that scamp, Reuben Thorne, how are you, my child?—and the Holmes, and Mr. Blanchard, and Covey, and Fairfax, and Chatterton, and Goldberg. Is that all? Ah, no; here is my child, Richard Weston." She courtesied to him, and held out her hand; he took it in his. "Why, child, you forget what to do with it; you used to kiss it when you were younger." He kissed her fingers. "Your hair is as white as mine, child; when I first knew you it was bright and curly. I shall take my seat next to you. And there is my friend, Mr. Rowe—as straight as an arrow. Now, my dears, why do we want the attendants about us? We can help ourselves, and chat more freely. Send them away, Mr. Rowe, send them away."

At a sign from Mr. Rowe, the attendants, nothing loath, left the room, and did not enter again. The old lady continued:

"Now we can breathe. How many chairs are empty? One, two, three. Stephen Viner, the monster, is not here; and those two poor children—ah, me! Give me something to drink. No, not wine; water. I hope none of you will drink too much. Reuben Thorne, put down that glass. Drink was your ruin, and you know it. Who was speaking before I entered?"

"I," replied Reuben Thorne.

"You always had plenty to say. Go on, then; I dare say I interrupted you."

"The subject was about our first meeting not being more strange than this. Let me thank you for your presence here. You do not forget that it was I who first proposed this gathering."

"You have nothing to thank us for," said Rachel Holmes; "we are controlled by independent forces."

"Rachel Holmes," cried Dinah Dim, "your words were always very nearly unintelligible to sensible ears. Go on, Reuben."

"I have nothing to go on with particularly, and nothing very particular to say. My mind is filled by but one subject just now."

"What subject?"

"The absent ones—two whom we loved, one whom we hated. Say—am I right?"

"We all share your feelings," said Dinah Dim.

"I would prefer to hear each speak for himself," said Reuben Thorne, his eyes traveling from one to another of the strange company.

One after another expressed their adherence to his sentiments with reference to the three who were absent.

All but Mr. Weston have spoken," said Reuben Thorne.

"If I know anything of Richard Weston's heart," said Dinah Dim, "he agrees with us with all his soul. Why, of all our company, he is the man who in practice, the most eloquent on the subject of love. He married for love, my children. I call upon you to drink to the memory of his wife."

All the guests rose and drank the toast, bowing to Mr. Weston as they did so. He raised his glass, and drank with them.

"Who," continued Dinah Dim, with vivacity, "has the best claim to speak with authority upon this subject. It is not unknown to us that in his married life he tasted the sweet happiness that springs from mutual love. And when he lost his wife, did he not write upon her tombstone, 'Love sweetens all; love levels all? Honor to the man who, not in theory but in practice, carried out this noblest of all the creeds. It is fit that he should be the last survivor, and that he should preside to-night. Dear children, you know I was the oldest of thirteen, and you always treated me with

kindness. Well, it was right that it should be so, for I might have been the grandmother of some, when we first met. But it was my sad fate to dream only of the happiness which I once fondly hoped would be mine. I do not remember that I ever told you my story," she turned to Mr. Weston for confirmation or correction.

"I never heard it," he said.

"It is soon told. The man I loved was drowned at sea before we were married. That's the history of my life. He was drowned, and I lost him. That is how I grew into an old maid, living upon the memory of love. I found my consolation, as all find it who are faithful. Though," said Dinah Dim, her tones becoming lighter, "I think that Reuben Thorne would have tried to tempt me to change my name had I been ten years younger."

"I might," assented Reuben Thorne, "had I not suspected that you were constancy."

A shade of grief rested for a moment on Dinah Dim's face. "I had that word used to me at once when my heart was beating with the anticipation of a happy future."

"By your lover?"

"By my lover, lost to me for many years; lost when I loved him most."

A heavy step was heard upon the veranda, and there was silence in the room until the voice of Michael Lee was heard:

"Stephen Viner."

Almost before the words had passed his lips, the new-comer had made his way to the table, and without a motion or word of salutation dropped into a chair.

IV. MARGARET'S TRIUMPH.

A DEAD silence reigned for many moments after the appearance of the last comer. All eyes were turned upon him in anger and displeasure, but he did not raise his face to meet their gaze. It was a cruel face, with hard lines in it, a face which ordinarily was devoid of any expression of kindness; but although sternness was native to it, insensibility and some signs of remorse were visible on this occasion. That he heard no word of welcome was evidently—if one might judge from appearances—distressing to him, and he sat in silence, with hands tightly clenched beneath the table.

It was now ten o'clock, and the moon was at its full. The curtains of the window had been drawn aside by one of the guests, and the light of a lovely moon added to the peacefulness and beauty of the night. The landlord of The Silver Flagon regarded the guests watchfully and warily, and with uneasiness; but his attention was principally directed to Mr. Richard Weston.

The old gentleman's face was flushed with wine and excitement; after the first feelings of fear and dismay at the appearance of these unexpected visitors, he had striven hard to nerve himself, so that he might play his part in this strange scene in a befitting manner; that his nerves, however, were highly strung, was proven by an occasional convulsive twining of his fingers, and by his placing his hands before his eyes and then removing them, as though to prove to the evidence of his senses that he was not dreaming.

Dinah Dim, who sat next to him, was also very attentive in her observance of him, and now and again placed her hand on his, and took away the wine-glass which he would have raised to his lips.

She was the first to speak.

"The presence of this man," she cried, in an agitated tone, "is contamination. Why is he here on this last night of our ever meeting?"

Stephen Viner, with his eyes fixed still upon the table, seemed to wait in expectation of some other person speaking. As no one answered Dinah Dim's question, he did so.

"I was constrained to come," he said.

"For what reason?" she retorted. "For your own pleasure or ours? Friends, I appeal to you; did this man's presence ever bring one smile to our lips, or engender one kindly thought or feeling?"

"Never," answered Reuben Thorne; and "never" answered the others.

"His life was a curse to himself, and to those whom a sad fortune placed in his power. I ask again, why is he here?"

"Your words are harsh," said Stephen Viner, raising his hand as if for mercy. "Your tone is pitiless."

Dinah Dim laughed scornfully. "This man talks of pity," she exclaimed, "in whose cruel breast no spark of it ever dwelt. A pretty preacher, truly!"

"I have told you," he said, in a low tone, "that I was constrained to come to-night. Say that I am here for judgment."

"What kind of judgment," demanded Dinah Dim, "can you expect from us who know you? Has not your own heart punished you sufficiently?"

"It has," he replied, placing his hand to his breast with a gasp of passion. "Can I not make atonement?"

"What atonement, after all these years?"

"I can ask their forgiveness; I can tell them, as I tell you, that I repent of my cruelty, and that if they are able to roll back—alas for me that they cannot—I would act differently."

"See you now, my children," said Dinah Dim, rising—see you now, Richard Weston, who has tasted the priceless blessing of pure devoted love—this man who deliberately destroyed the happiness of two young lovers, comes before us when it is too late, and repents when it is too late. A pretty atonement truly is this that he proposes to make by asking the forgiveness of two innocent young creatures whom he drove to their death, and whose only crime was that they loved. What judgment should we pass upon him—what judgment does he deserve? As you saw, you shall reap. Let this man reap as he has sown. Would any one here hold out to him the hand of friendship?"

"Not one," answered Reuben Thorne, and every person present echoed his words. Even Mr. Weston, towards whom Dinah Dim looked for assent, said "Not one."

"Shall the curse of money," proceeded Dinah Dim, "forever outweigh love—love that humanizes the world? The man who, for money's sake, deliberately drags two loving souls asunder—the man who, for money's sake, deliberately poisons the lives of two young creatures whose hearts are drawn together by the holiest sentiment which sweetens life—brings desolation upon his soul here and hereafter. Who among us has one regret?"

"Stephen Viner," said Reuben Thorne, and again they all echoed his words. All but Mr. Weston, over whose face a convulsive shudder passed. Dinah Dim

looked at him for a moment, and observing his agitation did not press him to join in the general condemnation.

"Let Stephen Viner, then," said Dinah Dim, sternly, "go from among us. His presence brings shame upon us."

The man thus judged and condemned gazed appealingly all around, but saw no pitying sign. As he rose to go, Dinah Dim held up a warning hand, and Michael Lee's voice was heard for the last time:

"Caroline Miller. Edward Blair."

The lovers entered, side by side. Rachel Holmes moved from her place, and passed her arm around the waist of the young girl, who seemed to need support. They approached with slow and hesitating steps, and Mr. Weston turned toward them; but he did not see their faces. The excitement of the scene had completely overpowered him, and, with a wild motion of his hands, he sank to the ground in a state of insensibility.

When he recovered, he was lying on the ground, and Gideon Rowe was kneeling by his side. Uncertain whether he was awake or asleep, he closed his eyes, and seemed to fall naturally into a quiet dream—but a dream in which he was conscious—though not actually interested—of all that passed around him. It was as he lay thus, with his eyes closed, that he felt the influence of a womanly presence, in soft touches, and murmured words, and a tenderness of action not to be expressed. Opening his eyes, he saw no woman, but only his friend, Gideon Rowe, the landlord of The Silver Flagon, by his side.

"That is well, that is well," said Gideon Rowe, gently. "You feel better now."

Mr. Weston held his hands for a little while before he spoke. "I do not feel ill. Why am I here? What has occurred? Ah," he cried, with a shudder, as his eyes fell upon the folding windows of the room, "I remember now. Are they still there?"

"They! Who?"

"They! Who?" echoed Mr. Weston, wonderingly and weakly. "Can you ask—you were by my side."

"Come, come," said Gideon Rowe, in a soothing tone, "you must not distress yourself with fancies. Why do you look so strangely toward the room? No person is in it. You were overcome, and you fainted. But you are strong now. Come, let us see if you can walk a bit. That's right, that's right." He assisted Mr. Weston to rise, and they paced the veranda slowly, Gideon Rowe purposely pausing by the window, to give Mr. Weston assurance and to dispel his fears. "Will you go in?"

"No, no," cried Mr. Weston, "we will sit here; the night is very beautiful. Do you believe in omens?"

"No."

"Has any serious one ever occurred to you?"

"None, in my remembrance."

"Were you not telling me of poor Philip's death some time to-night?"

"Yes," replied Gideon Rowe, with a heavy sigh.

"How did he die? What was the cause of his death?"

"Poor lad! he died by fire. It is a dreadful story."

The father's voice was shaken by grief.

"If it will not distress you too much to tell me," said Mr. Weston, taking Gideon Rowe's hand, "I should like to hear more about him. Do not think me unkind, but I am in a strange mood. I feel like a child. What o'clock is it?"

"Past midnight."

"About Philip, now; indulge me. I loved the boy myself."

"Your Gerald loved him; they were true friends. Had Philip lived, they would have found much joy in their friendship, but fate willed it otherwise. Poor Philip died in the gold-fields in Australia—but I promised that you should hear the story from the lips of the widow. Will you see her? She is very near."

"I fancied just now when I awoke that a woman was near me."

"It was Margaret."

"Margaret!" echoed Mr. Weston. The name brought with it reproachful remembrances.

"That is the name of the girl Philip married."

"Yes, I will see her. One moment; I must not miss saying what was in my mind. I was speaking of omens. You had no foreshadowing of Philip's death?"

"None; the poor lad was dead for many months before I heard the news."

"But omens come occasionally to some persons."

"I have read and heard so."

"Gideon, one has come to me; it may foreshadow my death. I have seen the dead."

Gideon Rowe made no comment upon this, but went to the end of the veranda and called "Margaret."

Margaret—our Margaret—herself appeared, simply dressed. She approached Mr. Weston, with a gently serious expression on her beautiful face.

"It is you," he exclaimed, gazing at her in wonder.

"Yes," she said, "poor Philip was my husband."

"Why did you not tell me this before, Margaret?"

"I had my reasons. Perhaps I was not sure whether I could trust you."

"Margaret," interposed Gideon Rowe, "Mr. Weston wishes to hear the particulars of our poor boy's death; I promised that you should tell him."

Margaret turned her head; her lips trembled; tears rushed to her eyes.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Weston, with ready sympathy; he was much softened during the last few hours; "another time. It will pain her too much."

But Margaret had a purpose in telling the story, and she related the particulars of Philip's death in simple language and in feeling tones. She felt every word she spoke; she was not acting now, and natural pathos it was that drew tears from Mr. Weston.

"I saw my devoted darling in the flames," said Margaret, between her sobs, "looking for me with blind eyes. I tried to get to him, but they held their arms round me, and I could not escape from them. But there was one—ah, there was one—who, seeing my despair and Philip's peril, rushed into the flames to save his friend. Too late, alas! he dragged my darling out of the burning house, but could not save his life; yet he gave my Philip to me for a few blessed hours."

Overcome by her emotion, Margaret paused.

"A noble action!" said Mr. Weston, softly. "A noble man!"

Margaret nerved herself to proceed. "He and I nursed Philip, and watched the life die out of him. Every word my darling uttered is graven on my heart

"Dear old fellow!" he said, with feeble gasps, to this dearest of friends. "Noble old fellow! God bless Margaret and you!"

"Indeed, indeed," said Mr. Weston, "a blessing should fall upon such a man!"

"Take care of Margaret," whispered Mr. Philip; "be a father to her. Dear old dad! I hoped to see you, and show you my darling. But he will bring her to you." He uttered but few words after that," continued Margaret, who, standing now between Mr. Weston and Philip's father, held a hand of each, "but they all referred to his noble friend and to me, and you, sir" (to Gideon Rowe), "whom he loved most tenderly. So my Philip died. Perhaps he hears me tell the sad story of our love on this solemn, beautiful night. Philip, my darling!" she murmured, softly, raising her tearful eyes to the bright heavens; "if you can help me bring the blessing you invoked upon your friend's head, you will bring a blessing also to your Margaret, in whose heart you will live till she comes to join you in a better world than this!"

"Is this friend, then, unhappy?" asked Mr. Weston, with no suspicion of the truth.

"Most unhappy—most undeservingly unhappy. Ah, sir, if you had it in your power, would you not help him—would you not be proud to bring joy into the life of such a man? You were right in calling him noble. Such a nature as his ennobles the world! And yet at this moment he is stricken down by grief."

"He is here, then—in England?"

"He is here, in England, in Devonshire, within sound of my voice."

"What is his name?"

"I must relate an incident of his early life before I tell you in proof that this act of devotion toward my Philip was not the only act of sacrifice and devotion he has performed. Not the only one, do I say? His life is full of noble deeds. When he was young he had a friend—nay, do not take your hand away; he and his friend loved the same girl. He saw that the girl's heart was given to his friend, whom he had kept in ignorance of the state of his affections, out of consideration for him. Listera now to what this man did when he fully learned the truth. Loving this girl, he could not remain near her without betraying himself. Knowing that the revelation of his love would bring distress both to his friend and the girl he loved, he went from them suddenly. He did more than this; his friend, at that time was not rich. He himself had some little store of money—between one and two thousand pounds, as near as I can learn; he placed this money—the whole of his fortune—in the hands of a lawyer, to be given to the girl, with strict instructions that neither she nor his friend should know from whom it came. It is now for the first time that his friend hears of this act of sacrifice and unselfishness—Why do you turn from me?"

"Let me be, child, for a few moments," said Mr. Weston, in broken tones. "I might have guessed—I might have guessed. Where in the world could I find another such noble heart as Gerald's? I have wronged him—deeply wronged him."

"A fault confessed is half atoned for," said Margaret, pursuing her advantage. "Complete the atonement. You can do so."

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